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# mindfields

THE JOURNAL ABOUT IDEAS AND LEARNING

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**ARE OUR CHILDREN EQUIPPED?**

**IDEAS ON EDUCATION**

M.K. Gandhi

Greg Mortenson

Professor Yash Pal

Sir Ken Robinson

**Celebrating Survivors**

SALAAM BAALAK TRUST





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# EDITOR'S NOTE



Happy to announce that my co-editor and *Mindfields'* publisher, Luke Haokip, was one of the finalists for British Council's Young Publishing Entrepreneur Award (2009) for his work with *Mindfields*. Reaffirming. Also, reaffirming is our growing list of subscribers, and the fact that there is even a *Mindfields* page on Facebook. Not bad for a magazine with no filmstars - and lots of educators - in its pages! Take a bow, readers!

This is the issue of giants. MK Gandhi's ideas on education; the remarkable American mountaineer Greg Mortenson with his mission to build schools in strife-torn Pakistan and Afghanistan; an interview with scientist and educator extraordinaire - Professor Yash Pal; and a transcript of Sir Ken Robinson's provocative talk on 'How Schools Kill Creativity'.

Thank you for your continued support. Do spread the word, renew your subscription, and gift a subscription to a like-minded friend.

Warm regards

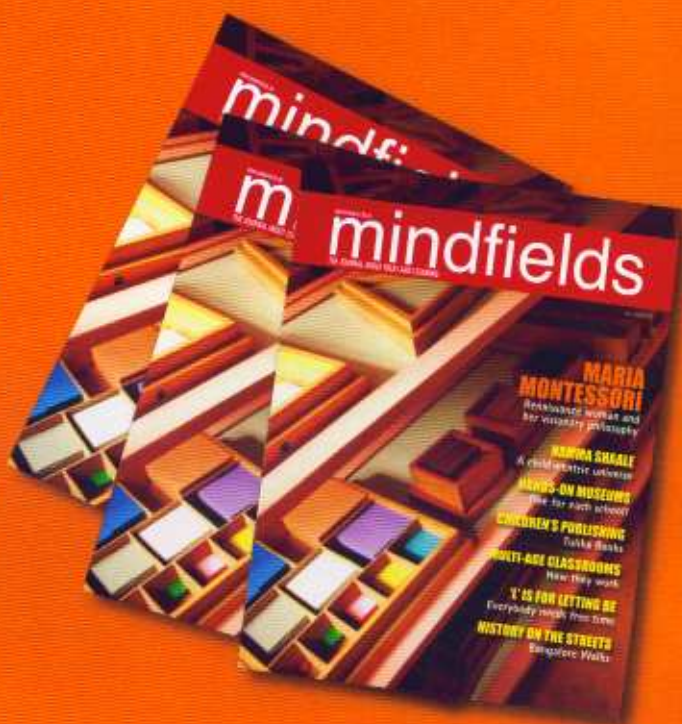
Amruta Patil  
Co-Editor (with Luke Haokip)



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XSEED is compatible with the syllabus followed by CBSE, ICSE, IB and various state matriculation boards.



## MAILBOX

I have had the pleasure of learning from your delightful effort for the past one year or so. Your magazine collates knowledge on various endeavors that have been initiated across India and that brings to us, the readers perspectives, which are both, informed and most of the times application based. As an academic, I come across a potpourri of students with differential needs, attention spans, and other related behavioural patterns.

Mindfields, not only exposes us to understand such concerns, but also demonstrates by its articles on various initiatives, how such concerns can be better incorporated into teaching pedagogies.

Alternative educational initiatives are pertinent towards building an inclusive society and in that manner Mindfields deserves much more than congratulations. However, there are structural forms of exclusion such poverty, deprivation, religion, caste, and gender etc, which inhibit children from accessing even basic education (which I feel should be compulsory and free). Further, there are issues pertaining to differential curriculum and 'exclusive schools'. Apropos, I would love to read more on how educational practioners are overcoming such systemic nuances.

With best regards,  
Prashant Negi  
Assistant Professor  
Dr K.R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and  
Minorities Studies, Jamia Milai Islamia

This letter is to thank Mindfields for the excellent photos you guys took of me for your article, 'Scientist Turned Toymaker'. My site ([www.arvindguptatoys.com](http://www.arvindguptatoys.com)) has just been named the favourite site of 2008 by Super Forest, and the photo they have chosen is from Mindfields!

Love and peace  
Arvind Gupta  
[www.arvindguptatoys.com](http://www.arvindguptatoys.com)  
by email

I have read about, and subscribed to, your quarterly, Mindfields. I am an aerospace architect with a passion for designing habitats/rovers/crew-systems for living off-the-planet. I recently moved to Mumbai from San Francisco - and am busy setting up a new base camp, meeting people, making friends, consuming tropical fruits by-the-dozen and exploring Mumbai's underbelly. In the past, I have helped launch 2 public charter schools in the US, organized international science-fiction story writing competitions, and recently helped create a presence for NASA on 'Second Life'. I love dabbling in initiatives that involve young people (and in some sense 'the future') in different ways.

Next year sometime, I plan to launch a non-profit (more, a movement really) called FM2TM (Fly Me 2 The Moon). I am planning several initiatives including one that involves getting the Honda robot (ASIMO) to come be part of

classrooms in schools that are experimenting with new ways of learning. ASIMOs (there will be more than one) relationship to humans and vice versa would be symbiotic and exploratory. (Visit here for a glimpse - <http://world.honda.com/ASIMO>)

ASIMO has, so far, been playing the role of a visitor; in this new experiment ASIMO will be a long-term resident (friend, teacher, fellow-classmate), and will move with the kids (as they move on to the next grade) and grow with them. The kids will get to learn to co-exist with humanoid robots who can speak their language and the robots will get to learn how to live with a species that is at once both intelligent and emotional. Would be good to share ideas with Mindfields since you guys are interested in ideas and alternative learning.

Cheers,  
Susmita  
by email

DO YOU HAVE CRITIQUE TO OFFER US? OR A STORY IDEA OR EXPERIENCE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE? WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU. MAIL US AT: [EDITOR@MINDFIELDS.IN](mailto:EDITOR@MINDFIELDS.IN) SELECTED LETTERS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF MINDFIELDS.

# 'Literacy in itself is no Education'



No one rejected colonial education as sharply as M.K. Gandhi did; nor did anyone else put forward an alternative as radical as the one he proposed. For Gandhi, education was the means by which knowledge of the past is passed on to the present generation in an organised manner. He saw education as a life-long process, an instrument of social change - and he wanted education to bring about not just economic advancement but political evolution and moral responsibility as well.

Text/Photos : Amruta Patil/Luke Haackip | Additional Photos: Wikipedia

**“Y**ou are at the hope of the future. You will be called upon, when you are discharged from your colleges and schools, to enter upon public life to lead the poor people of this country. I would, therefore like you students to have a sense of your responsibility and show it in a much tangible manner. It is a remarkable fact, and a regrettable fact, that in the case of the vast majority of the students, whilst they entertain noble impulses during their student days, these disappear when they finish their studies...”

*'The selected works of Gandhi', Vol. 6, The Voice of Truth*





#### MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI: A BACKGROUND

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was born in Gujarat to a reasonably conventional middle class Indian family. His father was the senior dewan (official) of a small state (Porbandar) before moving on to become the chief karbhari (adviser) in the principality of Rajkot. Young Mohandas Gandhi was an average student at school - who did not particularly excel at anything, but did what was expected of him. At the age of thirteen, he was married off to Kasturba Makanji, also thirteen, the daughter of a local merchant. Gandhi would go on to strongly condemn the 'cruel custom of child marriage'. At the end of his formal schooling he went to England to study law.

He returned to India briefly, found that he could not make a successful career as a lawyer and moved to South Africa in 1893. His experiences there were to change his life forever. In South Africa, Gandhi came face to face with the kind of blatant racism and discrimination he had never witnessed in India. The

"The emphasis laid on the principle of spending every minute of one's life usefully is the best education for citizenship."

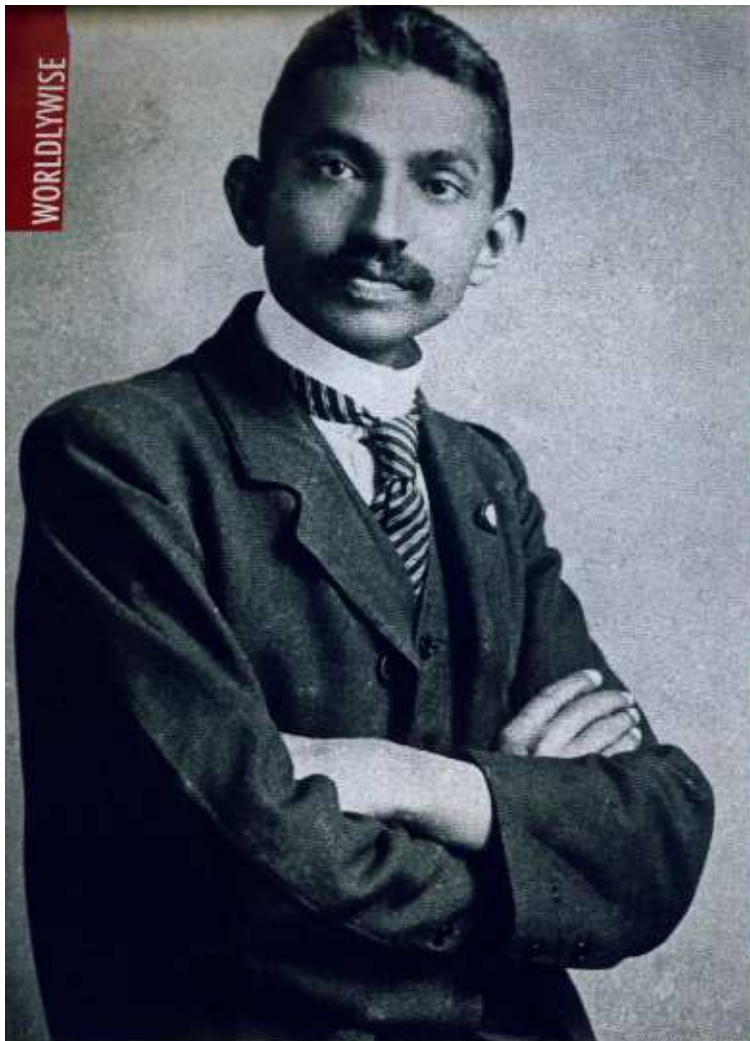
humiliation he felt turned him from a meek, unassertive individual into a determined political activist. He started off as an advocate on civil rights for the Indian community there, and then became their leader in a political movement against racial discrimination and for South African Indian rights.

Gandhi's methods were always unusual. His struggle against the

authorities, in keeping with his Hindu beliefs was based on a strict adherence to non-violence. The struggle, thus, consisted of passive resistance - the peaceful violation of certain laws, the courting of collective arrests (he encouraged his followers to fill the jails), non-cooperation with authority, boycotts and spectacular marches. These methods were later perfected in India in the fight for independence from the British Empire.

It is impossible to distinguish Gandhi's political ideology from his ideas on education. Education, he believed, not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals of which it is composed. His





GANDHI AS A YOUNG MAN

experience in South Africa not only changed his outlook on politics but also helped him to see the role education played in that struggle.

Gandhi had been a product of Western education, and for a while in South Africa, he persuaded Indians to take advantage of it. However, in his mid-thirties, as his own political convictions became more solid, he became openly opposed to English education. He was enraged that he had to speak of Home Rule or Independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue, that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue, that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in English for the chosen few. 'To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them,' he said. "...by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation."

#### SWARAJ, SWADESHI AND NON-WESTERN EDUCATION

*"I find daily proof of the increasing & continuing wrong being done to the millions by our false de-Indianising education.... We seem to have come to think that no one can hope to be like a (Subhash Chandra) Bose unless he knows English. I cannot*

*conceive a grosser superstition than this.... We, the English educated people alone, are unable to assess the great loss that this factor has caused. Some idea of its immensity would be had if we could estimate how little we have influenced the general mass of our people.*

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*"It is my considered opinion that English education in the manner it has been given has emasculated the English educated Indian...The process of displacing the vernaculars has been one of the saddest chapters in the British connection.... No country can become a nation by producing a race of imitators.... The sooner, therefore educated India shakes itself free from the hypnotic spell of the foreign medium, the better it would be for them and the people."*

*'The selected works of Gandhi',  
Vol. 6, The Voice of Truth*

Gandhi was vehement in his rejection of Western influences or 'modernisation' which people blindly, unquestioningly accepted as progress. He believed that the stranglehold of industrialisation and materialism (which the British Empire brought) posed a threat to Indian village communities that had traditionally been self-sufficient and self-governing. What Gandhi aspired for was 'swaraj' and 'swadeshi' – autonomy and self-reliance. 'Swaraj' for Gandhi was not just about ousting the British from India. He wanted the value system of the British Raj to be replaced by a simpler, more spiritual, communal life – based on the archetypal Indian village.

*"My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity."*

*"...Every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The*





*village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis."*

For Gandhi, education meant holistic nurture of mind and body. He emphasised the three H's (head, heart, hand) rather than the three R's (reading, writing, arithmetic). Discipline was a key aspect of his concept of education, as also was the learning of manual skills. Work experience, he felt, stimulates the mind. Unfortunately, Gandhi's call for an all-round education has gone unheeded today. Most urban schools lay too much stress on studies and look down upon manual work.

Gandhi wanted education to equip the youth to handle the tremendous changes that a society in transition

**"Craft, Art, Health and Education should all be integrated into one scheme. Nai Talim is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death..."**

throws up. He wanted education to nurture individuals with strength of character. At the same time he believed that education should be need-based. Education, he believed ought to put a stop to unemployment and result in economic self-sufficiency.

Gandhi's basic idea of education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception that an ideal society consisted of small, self-reliant communities with the ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative

community. He wanted the Indian education system to strike a balance between individual good and community good. He wanted education to train individuals to think independently, critically and creatively and thereby bring about personal worth, dignity and self-sufficiency. It was an education that considered the whole person, rather than concentrating on one aspect of him or her. Education was a highly moral activity.





Photo courtesy Narayana Shastri, Bangalore

LEARNING ABOUT THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR

The core of his proposal was the learning of handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make it the centrepiece of the entire teaching programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of the caste system.

Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather-work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and book-binding, had been the work of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. India's own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasised skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly.

Gandhi's proposal to introduce productive handicrafts into the school system was not as outrageous as may appear. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources

from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state, which he felt would mean interference from the centre.

Gandhi's social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called 'basic education' favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society in such a way that it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of 'education' and to change the established structure of opportunities for education.

The term 'religious education' in Gandhi's writing may bring forth strong reactions today – but what Gandhi wanted was for children to study the important tenets of all religions, so they become aware of the similarities rather than the inconsequential dissimilarities that fuel so much hatred. In the current atmosphere of heightened religious and sectarian tensions and crumbling values, Gandhi's call for religious education should be interpreted as a call for value-based education.

Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the combination of swaraj and swadeshi as it related to the education system. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned.

Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation finds reflection in the ethos of informal education. Gandhi's 'basic education' was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant on co-operation between individuals.

#### ON TEACHING

*"A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them."*

*(Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, Sevak, 15 February 1942 CW 75, p. 269)*



## Head, Hand, Heart

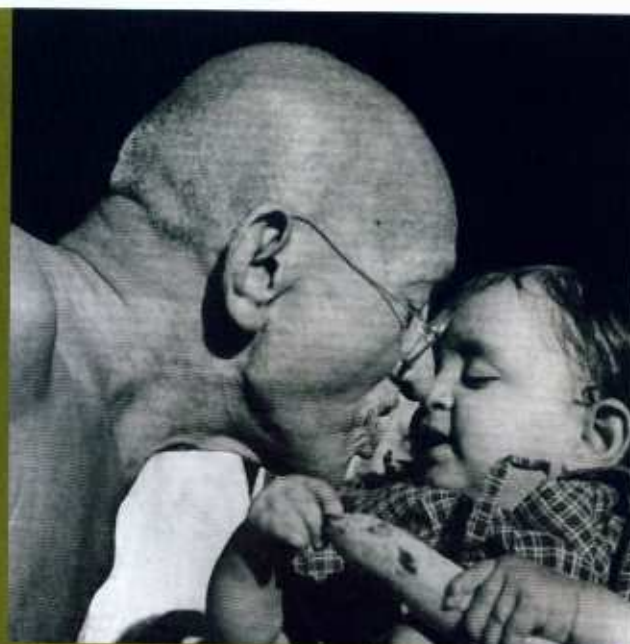
"The school must be an extension of home there must be concordance between the impressions which a child gathers at home and at school, if the best results are to be obtained. Education through the medium of strange tongue breaks the concordance which should exist... The harm done by this alien type of education does not stop here; it goes much further. It has produced a gulf between the educated classes and the masses. The people look on us as beings apart from them."

~

"The ancient aphorism "Education is that which liberates", is as true as it was before. Education here does not mean mere spiritual knowledge, nor does liberation signify spiritual liberation after death. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation means freedom of all manner of servitude is of two kinds: slavery to domination from outside and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone contributes true study."

~

"Our system of education leads to the development of the mind, body and soul. The ordinary system cares only for the mind... Useful manual labour, intelligently performed is the means par excellence for developing the intellect.... Our children must from their infancy be taught the dignity of such labour... not be taught to despise labour. There is no reason why a peasant's son after having gone



to school should become useless as he does become, as an agricultural labourer."

~

"Craft, Art, Health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. Nai Talim is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death..."

~

"Persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness are the first requisite for acquiring learning of any kind. Inquisitiveness should be tempered by humility and respectful regard for the teacher. It must not degenerate into impudence. The latter is the enemy of the receptivity of mind. There can be no knowledge without humility and the will to learn."

The right to autonomy that Gandhi's educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school's daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that 'the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils'.

Gandhi's plan, on the other hand, implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village. ■



# *the poetry of science and learning*

Distinguished scientist and stalwart educator Professor Yash Pal talks to Rima Chibb about classrooms, curriculums, and lifelong learning.

Interview: Rima Chhib | Photos: Studio Umbilical, Prof. Yash Pal's personal collection

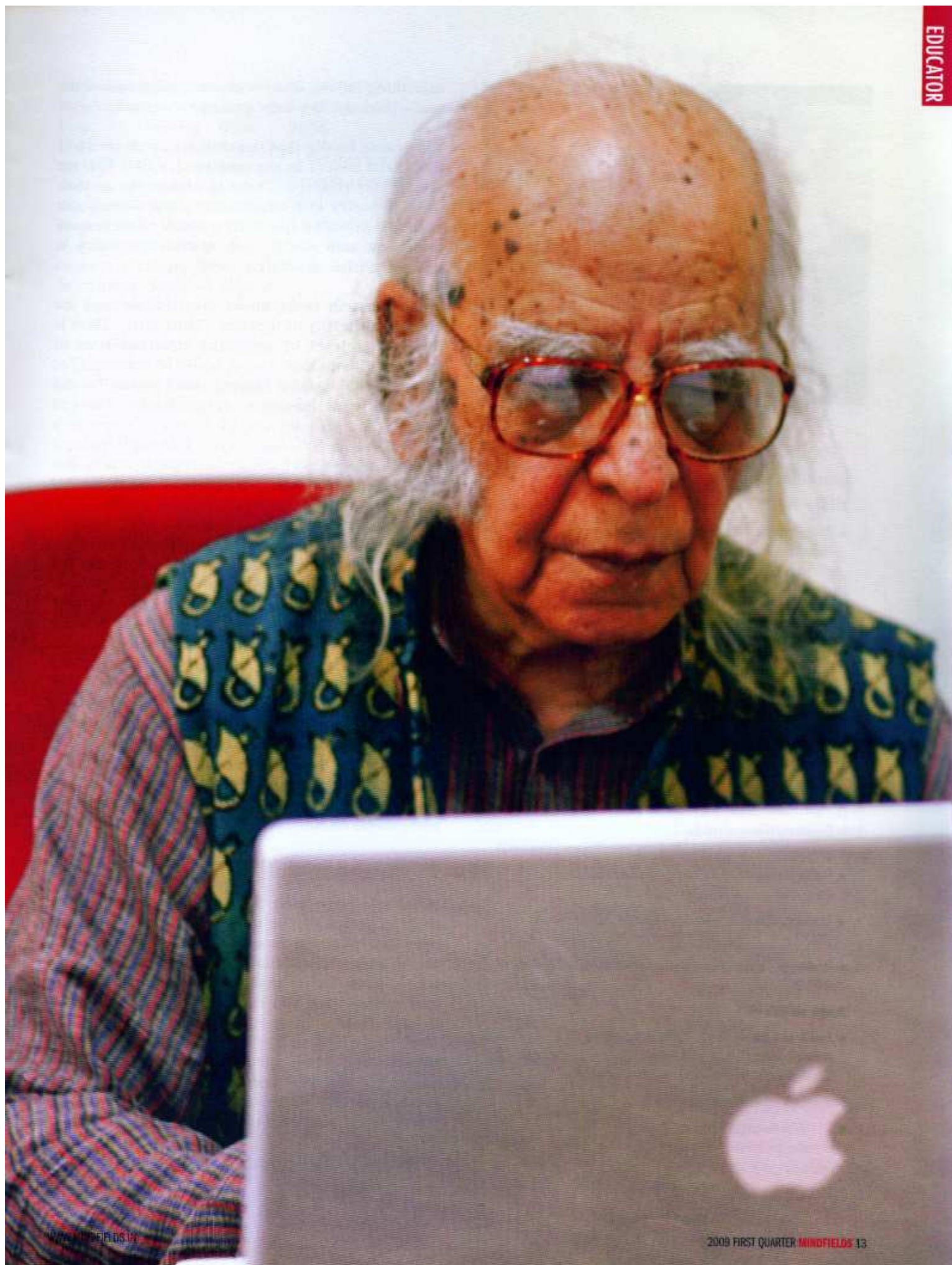
Tell us about 'inquiring minds'... How does science come into the framework when we talk about kids?

I think children are naturally curious. In that sense they are born scientists. They are always fond of finding things out, they keep on asking questions. They also experiment. When a baby sees a little ball it touches it, rolls it around, puts it in its mouth - it is trying to find out. So this is an inherent quality of humans, that they are curious. Many a time I feel it is not so much a question of teaching; it is a question of ensuring you do not destroy this inherent capability (to be inquisitive) but build on it.

You had talked about discovering poetry through science.

You see things working together and begin to notice the same principles applying, whether you play cricket, throw (an object), see









PROF. YASHPAL WITH HIS WIFE NIRMAL AT M.I.T. (1955)

## ABOUT PROFESSOR YASHPAL

**Born:** 26th November 1926

### Education:

- Post-graduation in Physics at Punjab University in 1949, joined the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.
- In 1958 obtained Ph.D. degree in Physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

### Professional

- Visiting Professor at the Neils Bohr Institute Copenhagen, University of Positions Maryland, California Institute of Technology, Danish Space Research Institute.
- Chairman, University Grants Commission (1986-91)
- Secretary, Department of Science & Technology (1984-86)
- Chief Consultant, Planning Commission (1983-84)
- Secretary General, of the 2nd United National Conference on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (1981-82)
- Distinguished Scientist, Indian Space Research Organisation (1980-83)
- Director, Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad (1973-81)
- Professor, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (upto 1983)

### Area of Work

- Fields of Cosmic Rays; High Energy Physics, Astrophysics; Science Education; Space Technology; Communication and Development; Education.

### Honours and Awards

- In 1976 Awarded Padma Bhushan by the Government of India for contribution to Science and Space Technology

something falling, observe planets going around the sun – there are the same principles at work.

You realise finally that the stuff we are made up of was (first) cooked in the middle of a star! That we are all star children! There is philosophy in that, there is poetry and spirituality – and nobody can change it. It isn't a spirituality which arises because somebody said so, it is a spirituality which is inherent in the structure.

When Einstein spoke about theories, he used the phrase 'musicality of theories'. 'Musicality'. There is this higher level of aesthetics involved even in science. Without that science would be nothing. (You don't need to) keep on harping about musicality and spirituality. It emerges automatically through understanding.

What is the status of science teaching in India? You have mentioned the tragic consequences of centralised teaching and an overloaded curriculum.

Our better schools are as good as anywhere else – but we have a problem: we don't allow enough freedom – it happens because of a pressure to score a 100%. You can score a 100% not through understanding, but through mugging up. And so mugging up takes priority over understanding, and that destroys everything.

Then, to top it all, you send children to coaching classes. Coaching classes are the worst thing to happen to education because they (claim to) know exactly what to do, how to answer, what tricks to follow in order to get that extra mark. It is ridiculous! These hurdle races are anti-educational and I think we have to somehow escape them.

How should a science curriculum be formed?

We should learn from children about what to teach them. I personally believe if you keep your ears open and if you encourage the curiosity in children, you'll find the questions, the kind of questions which come. Out of that you can begin to frame a curriculum – and you can then go off at tangents. Going off at a tangent from something you are discovering is a marvellous thing! 'Isse yeh baat nikalti hai, usse yeh nikalti hai' kind of connections...if you keep on doing this then you create a world of understanding and connectivity for which you should give credit to children.

If we really can do that, in fact, I would say you



don't need any teacher training camps. If teachers keep on learning from children they'll never be out of date, because children are more current than any textbook written! Respect their curiosity and if you don't know the answer, tell them, "Bhai, I don't know. Shall we find out together?"

### NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (NCF) 2005

"I feel that my experience with children's queries, through postcards, from Television, the internet, hundreds of face-to-face interactions and thousands of questions through newspaper... all this learning influenced the framing of the National Curriculum Framework 2005"

- Professor Yash Pal

### Connecting science and life...

We had an All India Science Teachers Organisation and were working on a science curriculum. A question was raised by the Education Officer of Bombay Municipal Corporation - "You guys keep on sitting here doing research, why don't you help us in schools?" So I volunteered with some friends to work with children in various public schools.

We found out straight away that the examples we had given, the things we used in the laboratories - they didn't work with these children! They had a different experience at home, and it needed to be taken into account.

For example, we were talking of water pressure one day - take a big drum and make holes at various places then you'll find that the amount of water coming from the bottom-most hole will be more because of the pressure. And a child piped up, "Yes, when we store wheat in a gunnysack at home, and the rat gnaws holes in it, then the wheat comes out from the bottom with more force!" (When you teach children to connect things) every day experiences become a science experiment! Scientific language almost becomes redundant.

You say that the creation of all new (things) should be the role of all human beings and nobody should remain a consumer. How do we ensure that our children really become creators?

Creating is a genetic impulse and we have lots of people who create all

kinds of arts and crafts and cuisine. (Unfortunately) many creative impulses are suppressed because they are not 'saleable', cannot be advertised.

I admire the way tribal people in Assam can pick up a few bamboos and things and put them together in the right way to make a hut. They know

it will be strong, that they won't fall off it. That is very creative. They also have ways in which people come and pitch in and work in a community setting. If somebody's house needs to be repaired or moved suddenly, neighbours come and help build a new house. Now that is what is cooperative creative management: a whole community working together. It is a beautiful thing.

### Tell us your ideas about technology and learning.

Media forces everybody to skim the surface - don't go deep into anything, stay on the surface ...remember our brand name, don't try and understand anything or see if things are true or false, or check whether it is really a good thing to have salt in your toothpaste - that is the message of media. (Journalists) come to me and say, "Professor Yashpal tell us something in brief." And I ask them, what do you want? And they reply, "We want a soundbyte." They want bytes. Little words here and there, no depth.

The same is true of what we call 'surfing' (TV channels or the internet). Children get into the habit of surfing, staying on the surface. I think the internet and the worldwide web are marvellous things but you need to be engaged with something to ask the right questions and separate the nonsense from what you really want.

Technology should be for widening the dimensions of learning rather than for depth of learning. Use it discriminately. It's the same with TV. There is so

### BASIC ELEMENTS OF NCF 2005

- Education is not delivered; it is constructed or created by each child
- Observation and curiosity to understand what is observed is an integral component of living and growing up
- Our systems with rigidly defined syllabi and fixed ways of transacting only that which is in the syllabus, wipe away all natural curiosity
- Learning should not be confined within specific disciplines. Learning from life and creativity can never be contained in any single discipline



much nonsense. This program, Shah Rukh Khan's 'Paanchvi Pass' - what a ridiculous thing it is - they get little children who have memorised (random schoolbook trivia) and pit adults against them. And they propagate this as 'knowledge'!

You've said that we need to make the walls between disciplines more porous.

This is precisely the problem, this (laboured) 'connection' between outside and inside and the connection between disciplines. There is nothing fantastic about it - it is natural. Every time some new thing emerges, it emerges at the boundary of two (or three, or four!) disciplines.

But we put our disciplines in airtight containers, making cubicles of learning. The whole notion of 'disciplines' perhaps came to us through our caste system - "This is for you, this is not open to you." - and through the feeling that all that is worth knowing has already been discovered. "This is in the Gita, that is in the Vedas."

I say, O brother, even God needs to carry out research these days! (laughs) He may have created the world, but it's no longer in his control. The world may yet yield things that he may not have known about, and if he comes here now - he will have to find out!

But schools have had the boundaries of English, Hindi, Math, Science, Social Studies right from the beginning.

Even defining these disciplines should alter. Life is not discipline imprisoned and that is why questions are important. Questions should be of a kind where you pick things from

WHEN EINSTEIN SPOKE ABOUT THEORIES, HE USED THE PHRASE 'MUSICALITY OF THEORIES'. 'MUSICALITY'. THERE IS THIS HIGHER LEVEL OF AESTHETICS INVOLVED EVEN IN SCIENCE. WITHOUT THAT SCIENCE WOULD BE NOTHING.

different places. It is not as tough as we make it out to be. Maybe it would help to shut down schools for a while (chuckles). Let children have a year in between after school - to be themselves before the exams. You'll see that

they'll become much better children.

The Indian middle class has become very fond of this phrase - "Aaj kal competition ka zamana hai, ji" (This is the era of competition). What does it mean anyway - 'competition ka zamana'? You are the ones who set up competition like 'Paanchvi Pass' (laughs) and 'Kaun Banega Crorepati' - nobody else imposes competitions on you.

How do we ensure that classrooms encourage scientific thinking, and the spirit of inquiry?

Before classrooms change, the mindset of people has to change. For example, there are some very good books available from NCERT, but some of the public schools say, "Oh those books are for the poor and underprivileged, they cost only thirty five rupees."



PROF. YASHPAL WITH CHILDREN OF HIS FRIENDS [1951]

The rationale being, that if something costs more, it is better. That's not true, sometimes the less a thing costs, the better it is. The mentality of teachers needs to change, and more importantly, the mentality of management needs to change simultaneously. I must say that one worked very hard with CBSE and they did try out quite a few things.

Some days ago, I received a very nice article by Kiran Karnik about the 'The Kalam syndrome'. In Aishwarya Rai's beauty queen days, she was asked who her hero was, and she said Mother Teresa and won the crown. Similarly, these days when you interview people for any kind of job

THE MEDIA FORCES EVERYBODY TO SKIM THE SURFACE... I THINK THE INTERNET AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB ARE MARVELOUS THINGS BUT YOU NEED TO BE ENGAGED WITH SOMETHING TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND SEPARATE THE NONSENSE FROM WHAT YOU REALLY WANT.





and ask, "Who is your hero?", the answer is always 'APJ Abdul Kalam' and nobody else. In coaching classes, they have been told that the answer 'Kalam' will work. So many people from so many different backgrounds, so many different experiences – but their answer for 'Who is your hero' is standardised. People have standardised everything. (Laughs)

How would you define learning without burden?

What is the big deal – if you understand something, it is not a burden.

Once I was in an educational seminar in Bangalore and saw a 3rd or 4th standard book in which children were asked to name the capitals of countries like Kyrgyzstan and so on. So I asked the governor who was presiding over the seminar, "Sir, may I request you to give me the answers (laughing), I am sure you have been to all these countries and remember their capitals."

Why bother the children, yaar. It's written somewhere, they can find out when they have to travel to these places. Trying to mug up this sort of useless information is a burden.

You've led a full life.

Fullness means being engaged. This is how it should be. I received a letter yesterday that said, "If you are not your body Professor Yash Pal, then who are you?" So I started thinking about who I am. Everybody seems to ask this question – "Who am I?"

I am nearly 82 years; people think that I should have taken sanyaas long ago. I said, to hell with them, I've never worked harder, and I work because it's a joy. Sure, I cannot climb six flights of stairs effortlessly like I used to, but that's not all there is in the world. If you ask me if I want to be forty years old or twenty years old again – I would say, it would be marvellous but, no thanks. Between (the ages of) forty and eighty, my god, I have learnt so much, collected so many memories – I don't want to lose them. ■



RIMA CHIBB is a filmmaker and development communicator. Has taken it upon herself to undo the all-pervasive 'dumbing down' brought in by the idiot box. Conducts creative expression workshops for youngsters and is fearlessly empathetic with those who have learning struggles. You can reach her at [rima.chibb@yahoo.com](mailto:rima.chibb@yahoo.com)



# SALAAM BAALAK: CELEBRATING SURVIVORS

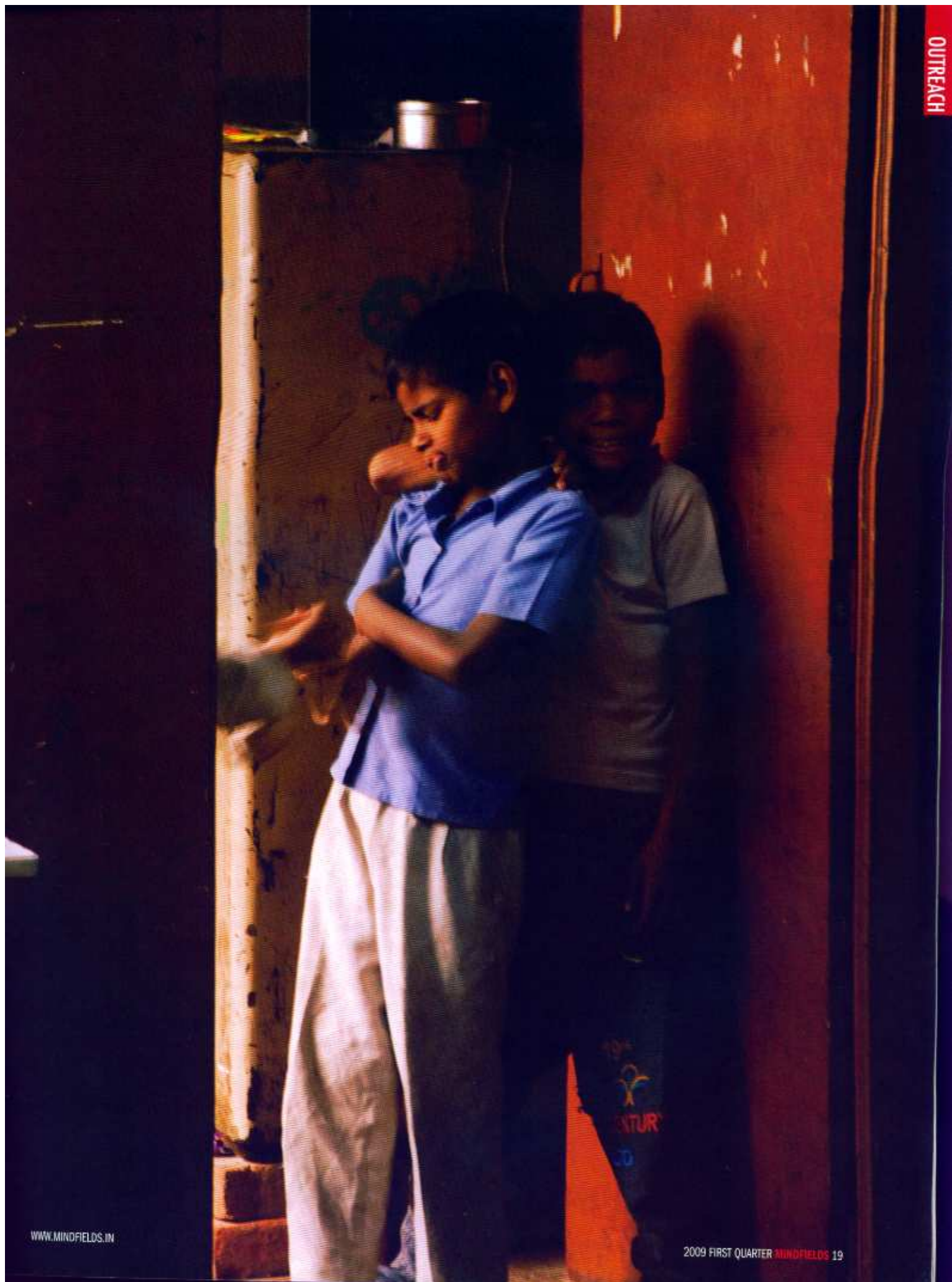
It started with a film - Mira Nair's 'Salaam Bombay!' (1988) - and it grew into a full-fledged effort to care for, protect, and nurture neglected street children. Salaam Baalak Trust works children in the underbelly of the city, and offers them full-care residential facilities, education, health care, repatriation...and a chance to reclaim their childhood.

Text: Anurupa Patel/Luke Haackip | Photos: Luke Haackip, Salaam Baalak

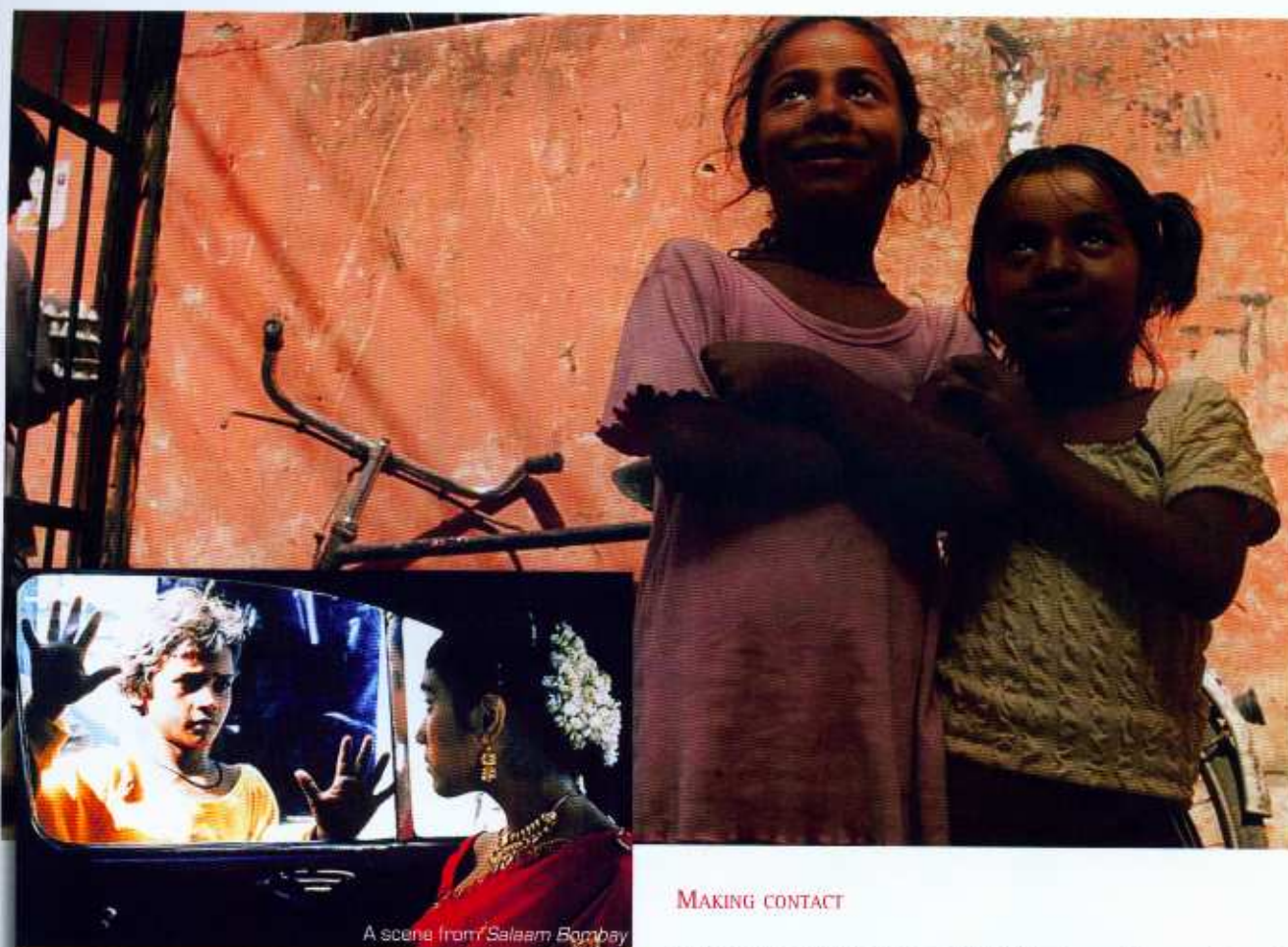
**W**hen you begin your journey as a runaway child on a railway platform in New Delhi, it takes courage, and time, to believe that a threatening world can make way for better things. Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT) helps lost children do just that. Their work provides street and working children with an environment where they can discover their skills and talents, realize their rights, and reclaim their childhoods.

It is a multi-pronged intervention process - from repatriation to rehabilitation, day-care programs to full-time residences, education to healthcare, from building emotional stability to building financial independence.









A scene from 'Salaam Bombay'

## SALAAM BOMBAY!

"We knew that, if we made any profit from the movie, we wanted to continue this work (interacting with the street children who were the film's cast). We looked all over...there were so many rehab programs that cleaned up the kids on Friday and put them back on the streets on Saturday. Or they were very into rehabilitation - "You can't be a street kid" and all that. None of them reflected our philosophy, which was to accept them as who they were. So we created our own program...Salaam Baalak Trust. My mother, who is a social worker, is chairperson of the trust. I really think it's one of those rare occurrences in film where there has been a real impact...its changed the way the Indian government regards street kids. I think this has been a result of the vibrant activities of (Salaam Baalak Trust), which I don't run (myself)."

*Mira Nair, Director of 'Salaam Bombay!', in an interview with the Guardian, June 2002  
Proceeds from Nair's film went towards establishing Salaam Baalak Trust in 1988.*

### MAKING CONTACT

The most crucial aspect of SBT's intervention program is to make timely connect. If possible, as soon as a runaway child arrives in a hostile, alien city. SBT staff first meets these children at 'contact points' strategically located in railway stations, crowded bus depots, city bylanes. Because of their vulnerability, gang leaders are able to coerce newcomers into drug-peddling and other organized crime. Staff members try to identify vulnerable children before they fall prey to antisocial elements active in the area.

The first person a new child meets at a contact point, is a peer educator much like himself. Peer educators are street children with a long association with SBT. Their role is to reach out to new arrivals, share their own stories, and build trust. Contact points are run as day-care programs, and many of them have developed their own niche.

The contact point of Kishalaya (near Connaught Place) provides behaviour-modification support to almost thirty children daily - many of them habitual drug users. Prerna Centre (Saket), on the other hand, reaches out to children who live with their families on the street. Many of them live with drug-dependant single parents, and their only interactions are with prospective customers of the balloons, small toys or flowers they peddle.



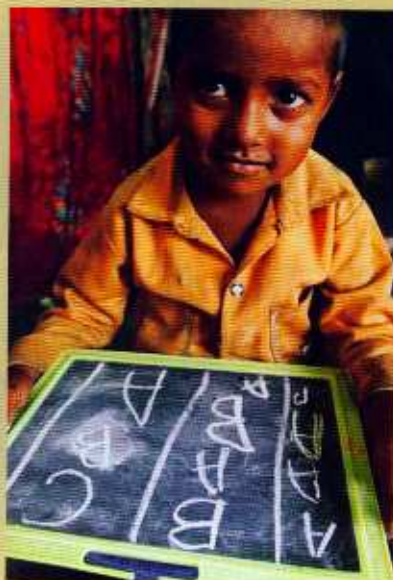
**S**BT believes that there is no instant solution for children who have been denied their right to education. However, we are charged with the imperative that there is no higher priority, no mission more important, than that of education.

Education of children at SBT has to be need-based and demand-driven. To fulfill these criteria, the trust employs various schemes of educational intervention, both formal and non-formal. Wherever possible, the objective is to bring children into mainstream education. The overriding goal, though, is to help children develop into informed, capable, and responsible citizens of our nation and the world. To these ends we variously engage with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), formal schools, non-formal education, and bridge courses.

#### NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING

NIOS is a national scheme for open learning to which SBT was accredited in September 2000. SBT has developed innovative syllabi for levels A, B, & C (equivalent to grade 3rd, 5th, & 8th) with the help of NIOS. Originally intended for SBT children, these courses are available to other young learners as well, providing an alternative route to educational attainment or higher education. Since the accreditation to NIOS, 453 children, including 150 girls, have passed NIOS (basic) exams. During the year, 132 children registered for NIOS examinations.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT SBT



#### FORMAL EDUCATION

Ideally, SBT would like to channel every child into mainstream education. Formal education enables children to interact with their peers from diverse backgrounds. It also helps instill a sense of accountability, positive competition and the desire to excel. SBT children are admitted into both, private and government schools of repute. So far, the Trust has been able to mainstream approx 3500 children in various classes. This year 154 children were admitted into various mainstream schools.

#### NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (NFE)

Non-formal education at SBT takes care of children's individual educational needs. The primary goal of this program is to motivate and prepare children to gain admission into formal school. Also it imparts life skills to cope-up with their circumstances. NFE focuses on interesting and interactive learning through a participatory approach. A wide range of techniques are employed under the program, including painting, games, story, telling, papier mache, songs, quizzes, bachhon ki adalat etc.

#### BRIDGE EDUCATION/ COURSE

SBT also provides bridge courses to those children who have suffered breaks in their formal education. The program provides intensive coaching to such children, aiming to help them rejoin formal schooling in a class appropriate to their age.

The first objective at all contact points is to send runaway or lost children back to their families (in 2008 alone, 551 children were restored to their families by SBT). Staff accompany the child back home; and counsel the family members to ensure the child does not run away again – people like the village head and school headmaster are encouraged to support the process of reintegrating the child into the community. Where repatriation is not an option, children are encouraged to join Salaam Baalak Trust's shelter homes for full-time care.

#### HOME AWAY FROM HOME

SBT has four full-care residential programs – Aasra, Apna Ghar and Armaan (for boys) and Arushi (for girls) – to give children refuge against harsh street life. Most of the





children have been survivors of physical and psychological trauma – and one cannot over-emphasize the role a secure shelter plays. The simplest of provisions – a safe place to sleep, a kind word at lunch – can transform injured souls into soaring lives.

The residential programs have full-time doctors to keep a close eye on individual health records; and there is careful supervision of the childrens' education. When children flee their homes, education is a certain casualty. Children find it hard to get an admission into regular schools after an unscheduled break in academics – especially in higher classes. SBT tries to ensure that the children are enrolled in regular private or public schools, or in non-formal schooling systems like National Open School.

SBT has a centralized education system, through a child's educational progress can be assessed at any point in time. An inhouse education committee ensures a streamlined coordination of educational activities and teacher training at different SBT centers. Volunteers assist with homework and remedial support when required. All the basic needs of the children – shoes, daily-wear clothes and uniforms, winter gear – are provided; as are nutritious and balanced meals made by the SBT kitchens.

The other valuable investment SBT makes in its children is that of economic independence. Children are involved in various crafts like – candle-making, macramé, papier maché – and the products are sold at highly visible outlets in the city, such as Fabindia and Dilli Haat. Profits go into the bank savings accounts of children responsible for

It was early Sunday morning. The meeting point – New Delhi Railway Station – was still sleepy. We met with two young teenagers, both charming; each having come to Salaam Baalak with their own experiences, histories, hopes, dreams and, yes, difficulties as well. One spoke of his dream to be a Bollywood actor and would often flash a film-ready smile.

Our walk started at the station, then ventured into the surrounding areas. We heard stories of train-jumping, which trains were the most lucrative, on which trains one found the most fruit or forgotten packages. Some children focused on collecting discarded rags, some hid on the tracks to jump on a train seconds after it entered the station, looking for anything left behind.

They told stories of the many difficulties they experienced; altercations with police, with the gangs that controlled each area, problems with each other, the dangers of hiding on tracks waiting for incoming trains, selling fruit back to the fruit stands, the allure of substances, and the ability to be on one's own.

One of our guides left home at the age of 8 and the other somewhat earlier. While quite young, their lives at home were problematic and while being on the streets had its own set of

## 'SALAAM CITY WALK' REMEMBERED



difficulties, it came with the allure of being in the big city and the possibility of a different life.

Each guide now worked for Salaam Baalak. Besides offering these "insider tours," they frequented the train station and tried to help get other children off the streets and into one of their programs.

They talked about their difficulties in getting off the streets, how hard it was to give up the freedom it offered, but how the people of Salaam Baalak offered them much help – from literacy, to help with the police, to overcoming dependencies – but as a child living on one's own, it was often hard to realize why they needed that help and to learn to trust.

After walking the streets of Delhi, we visited their home at one of the residences for older youths and then went to a centre for young ones. Salaam Baalak was a haven for so many of these children, making the transition off the streets much easier and giving them a structure and a possibility for another life. It was both heartwarming and heartbreaking. The problem is not specific to Delhi, India or even Asia – there so many more Salaam Baalaks the world needs.

*Maria Raponi is a Canada-based artist. She went on one of Salaam Baalak's city walks in 2007.*





## CHALTA PHIRTA SCHOOL

Chalta Phirta School, a mobile school van leased by Salaam Baalak Trust, enables it to participate in the Universal Elementary Education Program. The mobile school route halts at four communities in Delhi, and targets children between 6-14 years who have never been to school. It aims to stimulate an interest in education, sensitise parents, and eventually enroll the children in school.

At each stop, the van spends two hours in activities such as TV screening, games, non-formal education, group discussions, and counseling sessions on health, hygiene, social skills, and child rights. First Aid and supplementary nutrition are made available at the end of every session.

## CHILDLINE (DIAL 1098)

CHILDLINE is a 24 hours telephone emergency service for children in distress.

Working in coordination with the government and other NGOs, Salaam Baalak Trust operates the Central Zone of Delhi's Childline. This year Childline provided services to 1500 children, including shelter, medical, intervention, repatriation, emotional guidance & counseling.

KIND OF CALLS CHILDLINE HANDLES: ■ Medical Calls  
■ Shelter Calls ■ Repatriation ■ Child Lost ■ Rescue/  
Protection from Abuse ■ Direct Intervention Calls



their production. Those whose earnings are banked are encouraged to maintain their balances, with incentives to build up savings.

Children above the age of fifteen receive training in a wide array of subjects according to their interests and aptitudes. These include animation, film editing, photography, desktop publishing, web and graphic design, care-giving, housekeeping and computer - all potential careers. Small loans are offered to help establish small-scale businesses.

Twenty years since its inception, almost 50,000 children around India have been touched by SBT's work. Children from early batches have gone on to establish meaningful lives, embracing a wide variety of jobs and vocations. Some to become freelance photographers, dancers, choreographers, actors, theatre directors. Others have

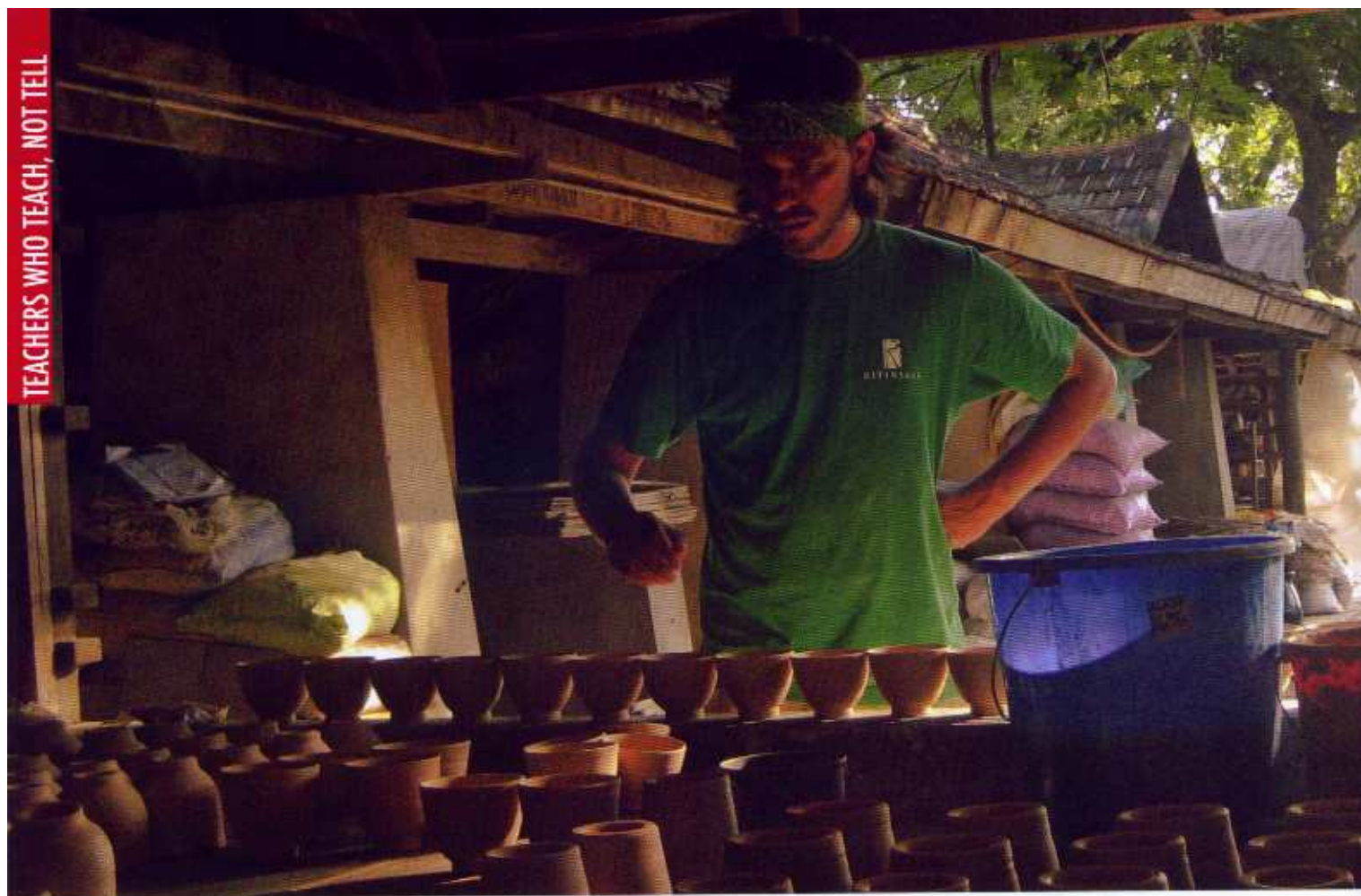
been absorbed into steady jobs with companies like Matrix, Café Coffee Day, Benetton, Pizza Hut, Miditech and Teamwork Productions. And some have returned, years later, to join the organization as employees, or start affiliated social initiatives of their own. They been changing lives every day for two decades now, but the people behind Salaam Baalak Trust insist that they have only just scratched the surface yet! ■

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Phone: +91 11 23584164  
Email: salaambt@vsnl.com

For information on volunteering and internship write to : volunteersbt@rediffmail.com





## SEEING LIFE IN 3-DIMENSION

Reyaz Badruddin cuts an unusual figure in a school staffroom. His journey has been unusual too - from the boy who grew up in Ranchi with no exposure to art; to rising star in the world of ceramics and pottery.

Interview: Mindfields Team | Photos: John Huber

Where did you grow up and do your schooling?

I grew up in Ranchi, Jharkhand. I went to Kendriya Vidyalaya.

What is your family background like? Number of siblings? Parents' profession?

Both, my father and mother were from a small village in Bihar. My father was an engineer and mother was a housewife. We are six brothers and sisters. I am the youngest.

What did your parents want you to be (professionally)?

Predictably, my mother wanted me to do medicine and my father wanted me to become an engineer.

Why did you decide to be a potter?

After 12th grade, I went to Banaras Hindu University (BHU) to study Applied Art. The first year was a foundation year in which we did a bit of everything; painting, graphics, textiles,

ceramic/sculpture. This was the first time I worked with clay, and at the end of the year, with little idea of how or even if it was possible, I decided to specialise in ceramics with the intention of becoming a potter.

How did your parents and community view your decision to choose this career? Were you seen as a rebel?

My mother passed away a year after I finished university. Although it was new territory for her, she had always taken an interest in, and encouraged my creative side, and her support, when I decided to study Art, and then to specialise in ceramics, gave me great strength. I could sense her concern in the questions she asked me, but this was outweighed by her confidence in me - that I would make the right decisions and do well.

My father has, only recently, started to understand and take an interest in my field. Now he often comes to sit in my studio, he enjoys seeing me work, says that he loves my



passion and discipline. He also feels proud when he comes to my exhibitions. For many years, my father was uncertain about exactly what I was doing, and sceptical about how I could make a living from it. Relatives, and the community in Ranchi and Bihar made it clear that they thought I was wasting my life by going to Art school after having done well in school. I have been slightly redeemed in their eyes only because my work has taken me abroad a few times, although I am sure they have been disappointed that I have not made money on these trips, where my focus has only been to develop my craft.

What role did your background play in your decision?

When I look back now, I feel that my mother had a great influence on me. She was very artistic herself, not in a conventional way, but she loved to create things - through knitting, crochet, sewing, embroidery cooking.

In Ranchi, I never had any exposure to art which would have allowed me to think of it as a possible profession. Growing up, I was left free to play with friends most of the time. When I look back, I can see how, left alone, we were so creative in our play. Many of my childhood memories are of playing with clay in the fields, drawing and painting in school, in the community hall, at home. The encouragement I received for my artwork or the appreciation for the gifts I made for others, made me feel that art was my special gift.

I was then lucky to be able to study art at university, without thinking very much about how or if I would be able to apply it. Without role models, even in University, I had little idea of what I could do with ceramics, so being a potter was a direction I took instinctually, feeling my way through, step by step.

What is it like for a young man in India to be a full time practitioner of the arts?

It is definitely not very easy whether it is India or anywhere in the world to be a full time practitioner of art and I love that challenge - I don't believe in anything which comes easily. I knew I was taking this challenge when I took pottery/sculpture and I am enjoying every moment of it. I feel fortunate that I had this choice to make.

Why were you drawn to teaching children?

It is very inspiring and refreshing to be around young, imaginative, always questioning minds. I try never to teach children - my own experience of school, was of being taught, not to learn and discover, but to pass exams instead. In my classroom, I like to be a facilitator, to work with the children



rather than lecturing them and telling them what is right and wrong. I leave them free to take their own decisions.

Sometime I feel that the children are much better artists than me, they come up with fresh, original ideas and inspire me to be freer. My job is to throw ideas and let them be the God of their own creations. I always remind them that God never asked anyone if He should make anything a particular shape or a colour. As a creator you are free too to create as you want. I help them with technical aspects of the work and provide them with different mediums to experiment with.

What are the challenges you face while teaching?

In a school system you are bound to have a few students who do not have much interest in the subject. In our society/system, art is still one subject which is not considered to play an important role in life. Since I do not like to force anything on anyone, I find it difficult to work with uninterested students. I also find it difficult to find enough time to develop my own work, since teaching does take so much time and energy.

What do you think sculpture brings into child's life?

Children are used to seeing and creating art in 2D, so first of all, sculpture gives them a sense of the third dimension.

What are your plans for the future?

A 'Clay Centre' where serious clay enthusiasts and people from different walks of life can come and enjoy being with clay.

What are your other interests and hobbies?

I love travelling, biking, photography. I collect ceramic works.

What do you like to listen to (music) and read?

I like to hear folk music from different lands. I also like to listen to different kinds of music from different times/eras.

What do you carry with you to school everyday? What's in your bag?

When I walk to school, I always carry three things but I reach with just two! I eat a banana or an apple on my way and am left with my wallet and my phone. I don't carry a bag to school.

If not artist/teacher, what would you be?

An activist or politician.





# How Schools Kill Creativity



Sir Ken Robinson led the British government's 1998 advisory committee on creative and cultural education. He is the author of 'The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything'. In this entertaining and thought-provoking episode of TEDTalk ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) – Robinson makes a case for creating an education system that nurtures, rather than undermines, creativity.

Illustrations: Amruta Patil



I have an interest in education. Actually what I find is that everybody has an interest in education...if you were in a dinner party and you ask (somebody) about their education, they pin you to the wall, because it's one of those things that go deep with people - like religion and money and other things. We have a huge vested interest in it partly because it's education that's meant to take us into this future that we can't grasp. If you think of it, children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065. Nobody has a clue what the world will look in five years time and yet we are meant to be educating our children for it.

The unpredictability...is extraordinary.

We have all agreed on the really extraordinary capacities that children have, their capacities for innovation... My contention is that all kids have talent and that we squander them pretty ruthlessly. So I want to talk about education and I want to talk about creativity. Creativity now is as important as literacy and we should treat it with the same status.



And by the time they get to be adults most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. We've run our companies by that way as well - we stigmatize mistakes. And we are now running national education system where mistakes are the worst things you can make and the result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacities.

Picasso once said this, he said that 'all children are born artists, the problem is to remain an artist as we grow up.' I believe in this passionately that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it, or rather we get educated out of it. So why is this?

I lived in Stratford-upon-Avon until about 5 years ago...a place called Snitterfield, which is outside Stratford where Shakespeare's father was born. Are you struck by a new thought?

When my son James was four - he was in the nativity play. (He) got the part of Joseph - which we were thrilled about, we considered this one of the lead parts... He didn't have to speak, but you know the bit where the three kings come in, they come bearing gifts...gold, frankincense and myrrh. The boys came in, little four-year-olds with tea towels on their heads, they put these boxes down. The first boy said 'I bring you gold!' and the second boy said 'I bring you myrrh!' and the third boy said 'Frank sent this!'

What these things have in common is that kids will take a chance. If they don't know they'll have a go. They are not frightened of being wrong. Now I don't mean to say that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. What we do know is that if you are not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original.

"We have a huge vested interest in it partly because it's education that's meant to take us into this future that we can't grasp. Nobody has a clue what the world will look like in five years time and yet we are meant to be educating our children for it."

You don't think of Shakespeare having a father do you. Do you ever think of Shakespeare being a child, Shakespeare being seven? ...He was seven at some point, he was in somebody's english class wasn't he? How annoying would that be! You know 'Must Try harder'...





achievements! They are just a form of life, you know, another form of life... I say it out of affection for them - there is something curious about professors. Not all of them, but typically they live in their heads. They are disembodied, in a kind of literal way. They look upon their body as a form of transport for their heads.

Our education system is predicated on the idea of academic ability, and there's a reason (for that). There were no public systems of education really before the 19th century. They all came into being to meet the needs of industrialism. So the hierarchy is rooted on two ideas. Number one - that the most useful subjects for work are at the top. So (at school) you are probably steered benignly away from things you liked, on the grounds that you would never get a job doing that. "Don't do music, you are not gonna be a musician." "Don't do art, you won't be an artist." Benign advice, now profoundly mistaken. The whole world is engulfed in a revolution.

(Then) we moved from Stratford to Los Angeles...something strikes you when you move to America and when you travel around the world. Every education system on the earth has the same hierarchy of subjects - everyone, doesn't matter where you go. You think it would be otherwise, but it isn't. At the top are mathematics and languages then the humanities and at the bottom are arts. Everywhere on the earth and in pretty much every system too there is a hierarchy within the arts. Art and music are normally given a higher status in schools than drama and dance. There isn't an education system round the earth that teaches dance everyday to children the way they teach them mathematics. Why? Why not? I think this is rather important. I think math is very important, but so is dance. Children dance all the time if they are allowed to, we all do... What happens is that as children grow we start to educate them progressively from the waist up. And then we focus on their heads, slightly to one side.

If you were to visit education as an alien and say 'What's (public education) for?'... I think you'd have to conclude (that) the purpose of public education, throughout the world, is to produce university professors... I like university professors (I used to be one) but we shouldn't hold them up as the high watermark of all human

And the second is academic ability, which has really come to dominate our view of intelligence... If you think of it, the whole system of public education around the world is a protracted process of university entrance. And the consequence is many highly talented, brilliant, creative people think they are not - because the thing they were good at school wasn't valued or was actually stigmatized. I think we can't afford to go on that way.

In the next 30 years according to UNESCO - more people worldwide will be graduating through education than since the beginning of history. It's a combination of all the things...technology, its transformation effect on work, demography, (a) huge explosion in population. Suddenly degrees aren't worth anything! ...When I was a student if you had a degree you had a job. If you didn't have a job it was because you didn't want one. But now kids with degrees are often heading home to carry on playing video games because you need an MA where the previous job required a BA and now you need a PhD for the other. It's a process of academic inflation and it indicates that the whole structure of education is shifting beneath our feet.

**"If you are not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original. And by the time they get to be adults most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. We've run our companies by that way as well - we stigmatize mistakes."**

We need to radically rethink our



view of intelligence. We know three things about intelligence. One that it's diverse, we think about the world in all the ways that we experience it in. We think visually, we think in sounds, we think in kinesthetically, we think in abstract terms, we think in movement.

Secondly intelligence is dynamic. Intelligence is wonderfully interactive, the brain isn't divided into compartments. In fact creativity - which I define as the process of having original ideas that have value - more often than not comes through the interaction of different disciplinary ways of seeing things.

The third thing about intelligence is that it is distinct. I am doing a new book called 'Epiphany' which is based on a series of interview with people about how they discovered their talent. I am fascinated by how



music. The specialist turned to Gillian's mother and said, "Mrs Lynne, Gillian isn't sick, she is a dancer. Take her to a dance school." She eventually graduated from the royal ballet school, she founded her own company, she has been responsible for some of the most successful musical productions in history, she has given pleasure to millions... Somebody else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down.

I believe our only hope for the future is to adopt a new conception of human ecology, one in which we start to reconstitute our conception about the richness of human capacity. Our education system has mined our minds in the same way we strip-mine the earth, for a particular commodity and for the future it won't service. We have to rethink the fundamental principals on which we are educating our children. There was a wonderful quote by Jonas Salk who said "If all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within fifty years, all life on earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within fifty years all forms of life would flourish." And he is right. What TED celebrates is that gift of the human imagination - we have to be careful now that we use this gift wisely and that we avert some of the scenarios we talked about. The only way we'll do it is by seeing our creative capacities for the richness they are and seeing our children for the hope that they are. Our task is to educate their whole being so they can face this future. By the way we may not see this future, but they will. And our job is to help them make something of it. ■

TO WATCH THE COMPLETE VIDEO OF SIR KEN ROBINSON'S TALK, VISIT:  
[HTTP://WWW.TED.COM/INDEX.PHP/TALKS/KEN\\_ROBINSON\\_SAYS\\_SCHOOLS\\_WILL\\_CREATIVITY.HTML](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_will_kill_creativity.html)



people got to be there. It was prompted by a conversation I had with a wonderful woman, Gillian Lynne, a choreographer - she did 'Cats' and 'The Phantom of the Opera'...I said (to Gillian) "How did you get to be a dancer?" and she said that when she was at school, she was really hopeless. The school wrote to her parents saying "We think Gillian has a learning disorder." She couldn't concentrate, she was fidgeting...But this was the 1930's and ADHD hadn't been invented at this point...

She went to see this specialist...and (after talking to Gillian in private for a while) the doctor said to her mother "Just stand and watch her." The minute they left the room, (Gillian) was on her feet, moving to the



# KUMON

A back-to-basics home study program, Kumon has caught the imagination of parents in Indian metros - reason partly being the 'results' it yields in subjects like Maths. Pooja Sukhpal looks at the phenomenon.

Text: Pooja Sukhpal

**W**hether at a petrol pump or in a grocery shop or in a conversation with someone, you have to deal with numbers in some manner or the other. How quick are you at calculating the cost of twelve litres of petrol or the change at the grocery shop or property related calculations? We need to make such calculations at some point or other. And then, what do we do?

I usually search for a strategy to get the result by breaking the problem into steps which are easy for my mind to visualise. And my mind is no computer, so you could imagine the time it would take in certain situations.

Else, the easiest way is to use the calculator or my necessary devil, the mobile phone.

Do you feel the same way? Mental computations help us handle such situations more easily. For me, it was limited to the practice of multiplication tables in my primary grades. To my surprise, there exists a complete system of developing proficiency in mental math, though I have my own reservations regarding

the system which I shall mention a little later in this article. Yet, I thought it is vital to be aware of the activities going on in the field of education; especially when one is a part of it.

My short search into it opened all kinds of opinions about it, both positive and negative. Here is my attempt to put them forth for your consideration.

## WHAT IS IT?

KUMON, this is the name of the International programme which aims to build the ability to make mental calculations. The objective of Kumon is to help the children master the fundamental skills which are essential for overall academic performance. It is also known as back to basics home study program.

It begins with the very basics of Math and goes on to the mastery of algebra and calculus. It intends to build mental computational ability of basic procedures of all these concepts, without using calculators.

The programme starts at the 'golden level' which is involves levels from 7A to A. These levels focus on number recognition, sequencing, addition and



**D11a KUMON**  
Multiplication: 2 Digits  $\times$  2 Digits 1

◆ Multiply.

Ex. 
$$\begin{array}{r} 32 \\ \times 14 \\ \hline 128 \\ 320 \\ \hline 448 \end{array}$$
  
(Add the results of '32  $\times$  4' and '32  $\times$  10'.)

(1) 
$$\begin{array}{r} 32 \\ \times 17 \\ \hline 224 \\ 320 \\ \hline 544 \end{array}$$

(3) 
$$\begin{array}{r} 32 \\ \times 71 \\ \hline 224 \\ 2240 \\ \hline 2272 \end{array}$$

**D13a KUMON**  
Multiplication: 2 Digits  $\times$  2 Digits 1

◆ Multiply.

(1) 
$$\begin{array}{r} 42 \\ \times 34 \\ \hline 168 \\ 1260 \\ \hline 1428 \end{array}$$

(3) 
$$\begin{array}{r} 42 \\ \times 23 \\ \hline 126 \\ 840 \\ \hline 966 \end{array}$$

(2) 
$$\begin{array}{r} 42 \\ \times 43 \\ \hline 126 \\ 1680 \\ \hline 1806 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 42 \\ \times 26 \\ \hline 252 \\ 840 \\ \hline 1092 \end{array}$$

**F31b**

(6)  $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{2}{5} + \frac{3}{7} = \frac{35}{70} + \frac{28}{70} + \frac{30}{70} = \frac{93}{70}$   
 $1\frac{23}{70}$

(7)  $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{4}{8} + \frac{6}{7} = \frac{35}{70} + \frac{56}{70} + \frac{60}{70} = \frac{151}{70}$   
 $2\frac{11}{70}$

(6) (8, 9, 24)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{72}$

Alternatively, you can use the following method to find the LCM.

Ex.1 (4, 6, 9)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{36}$   
$$\begin{array}{r} 2) 4, 6, 9 \\ 3) 2, 3, 9 \\ 2, 1, 3 \end{array} \quad 2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 \times 3 = 36$$

Ex.2 (6, 8, 12)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{24}$   
$$\begin{array}{r} 2) 6, 8, 12 \\ 2) 3, 4, 6 \\ 3) 3, 2, 3 \\ 1, 2, 1 \end{array} \quad 2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 1 \times 2 \times 1 = 24$$

**F33a KUMON**  
Addition of Three Fractions 1

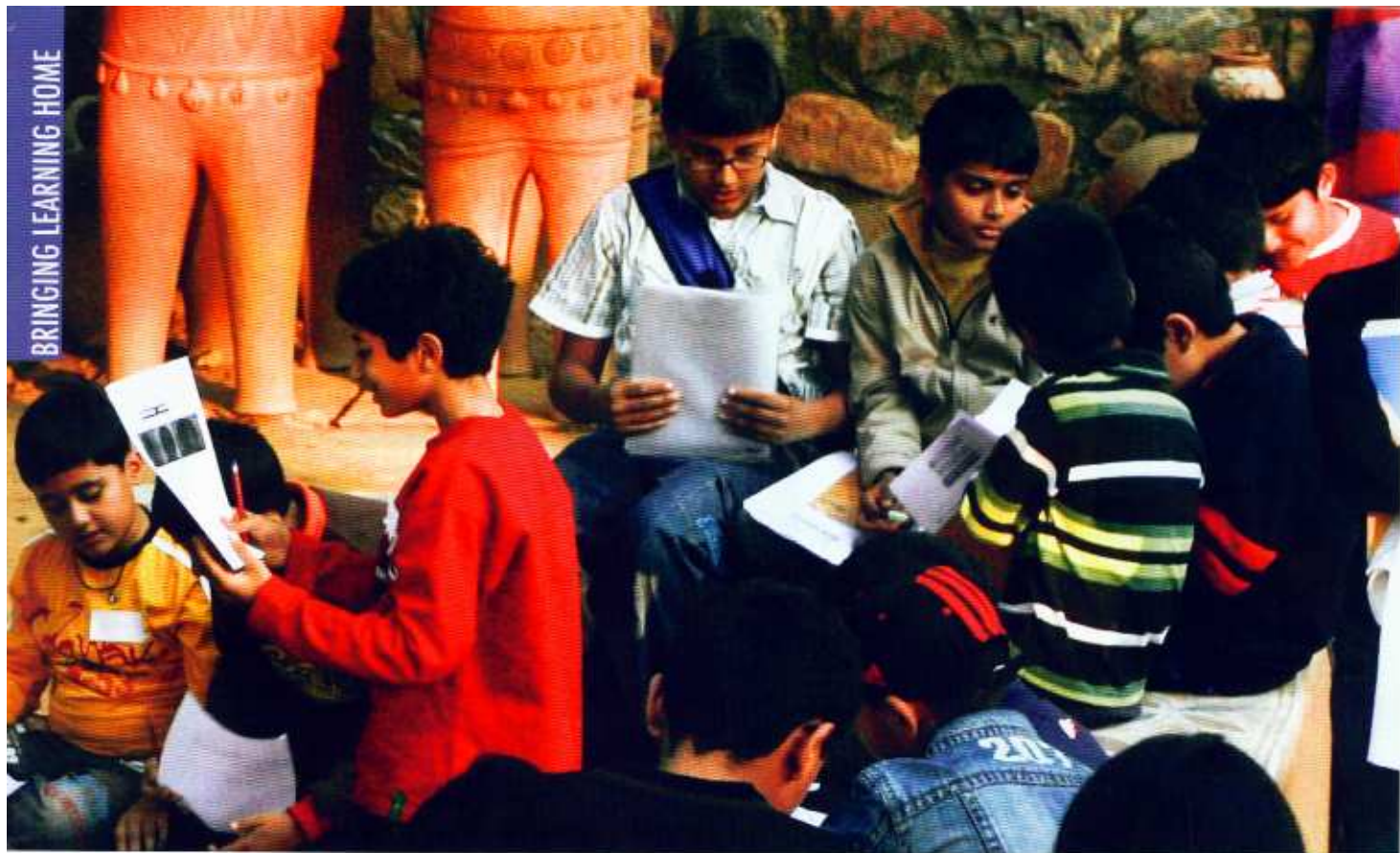
◆ Find the LCM.

(1) (2, 3, 4)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{12}$   
(2) (2, 3, 6)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{6}$   
(3) (2, 3, 9)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{18}$   
(4) (2, 3, 10)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{30}$   
(5) (2, 3, 12)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{12}$   
(6) (2, 3, 15)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{30}$   
(7) (2, 3, 16)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{48}$   
(8) (2, 3, 18)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{18}$   
(9) (2, 3, 20)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{60}$

**F33b**

(10) (2, 4, 5)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{20}$   
(11) (2, 4, 6)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{12}$   
(12) (2, 4, 8)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{8}$   
(13) (2, 4, 10)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{20}$   
(14) (2, 4, 12)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{12}$   
(15) (2, 4, 14)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{28}$   
(16) (2, 4, 16)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{16}$   
(17) (2, 4, 18)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{36}$   
(18) (2, 4, 20)  $\rightarrow$   $\boxed{20}$





subtraction. Then the programme goes up to level Q, which involves permutations, binomial theorem and statistics.

#### HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are Kumon centres where the students go after school study. These franchise centres are run by facilitators who are trained by Kumon people.

Interestingly, it is not necessary to be a Math teacher to run these Math classes at the centre. The centre has a chief instructor, assistant teachers, worksheets and supplementary tools like flash cards or magnets. The main programme has 23 levels, with each level having 200 worksheets. The proficiency at one level makes the student progress to the next level.

The study starts with an interaction with the child followed by a diagnostic test to decide the starting point for the student. Thereafter, the students attend the classes at the centre twice a week. There are everyday take-away assignments for home. At the centre, the students work by themselves through the concerned level worksheet. There is no direct teaching. Most of the task happens through the worksheets. The classes are usually short, of about 30 minutes duration followed by correction of the worksheets by the teachers of the centre. The same happens at home where the parents correct the worksheets done by the child.

Along with the graded worksheets, the focus of Kumon is on speed and accuracy. Every worksheet has about thirty to forty problems. Kumon believes that mastery can be achieved with lots of practice and repetition. Hence, the students are made to repeatedly attempt similar kind of questions under a time limit. The only condition for a child to move from a level to another is complete proficiency at the present level. After each level, there is an achievement test that decides if the child can move to the next level or not.

The method is not specific to any one country's curriculum. The levels of Kumon are not according to the school grades. The child who is in grade 2 could be doing problems at Kumon which are beyond that grade's curriculum.

#### WHAT DOES THE USER SAY?

However, some parents feel that Kumon first gives concept clarification which is followed by repeated practice through worksheets till the student achieves expertise in the concept. But it is similar to memorising something until it becomes automatic. The method primarily focuses on drill approach. Does this guarantee concept clarification?

We will have to check these children's problem solving ability to conclude that. Parents like Amita who is a mother of 9-year-old and 7-year-old Kumon



users, say that Kumon has helped in higher Math scores for her children. But unless the school exams have constructive problem solving, the scores alone cannot be the deciding factor.

Even parents like Amita believe that it is the initial excitement of quick calculation. What lies beneath is that the brain becomes habituated to procedures after such repeated practice. She emphasises that Kumon should have more than just a mechanical way of solving problems. It lacks creative problem solving. This had led to a stage where her two children are bored and strongly dislike Kumon and have finally quit the programme. Even before quitting, she had to work hard to motivate her children to even attempt the worksheets.

Next, Kumon claims to focus on thinking ability and it says that the students work at their own pace. But it seems far from the discovery approach where the students discover the concept on their own and deduce the rules. It appears to have a more mechanical approach to solving questions rather than a constructive problem solving approach. At primary stages, the children need to have a thorough conceptual understanding to build problem solving skills. The mechanical procedures are built along the way. So Kumon seems to achieve what it aims for to an extent but its methods give rise to two questions: first, whether mechanical ability is what children need; and second, why is Kumon not able to achieve sustainability for its program, among the children? Mr. Kumon had a profound premise that every child is a gifted child. He said that if we can provide proper cultivation and instruction, we can enhance his potential boundlessly. However, this premise calls for a study environment that is more constructive.

Personally, I also question the way children attend these additional classes after school hours. A comprehensive school curriculum should build the skill of mental computation too. It could also be done in a more constructive manner. Even a Kumon instructor feels that such a system could be woven into the school schedules.

Being in the field of Math education for some time, I see Kumon as being close to additional Math tutorials. The difference is that it works in a step-by-step way. Also, Math tutorials work according to the

**Toru Kumon: A Japanese Mathematics Educator; taught high school Mathematics after graduating from College of Science at Osaka University. Disappointed with his 8-year-old son's Math performance, he developed the Kumon teaching method for Mathematics. The first Kumon centre was opened in Osaka, Japan, in 1956.**



prescribed syllabus of a school and Kumon works with its own set levels. While the tutorials work around the complete syllabus and Kumon only works around mental procedures for concepts.

The curriculum developers also have a view that a curriculum is established keeping in mind the learning abilities of children, at a particular age. If Kumon says that an eight year old can do calculus, it seems like burdening children with a lot of mental

procedures. What we need more today is the ability to solve practical problems.

Some parents, like Preeti who is a mother of two ongoing users of Kumon (6 year old and 10 year old children), appreciate its individualised approach. She says that each child works and progresses from one level to another at his or her own pace. The parents say that at Kumon they are not worried about marks but the very nature of it is competitive. Everytime a child attempt a worksheet, he or she is timed. This gradually becomes a pressure for children. Another interesting point is that it is parents who are more excited about Kumon as compared to the children. I was dismayed to know that Kumon also encourage the children to keep doing worksheets even on their holiday trips.

Kumon aims to teach every child, without distinguishing between high or low scorers. I think the principles on which it works like time management and focused concentration are useful and valuable skills to have in everyday life. But the drill approach might not be the long-term result one seeks.

And then, it comes at an additional cost of nearly one and a half thousand rupees a month. So, its popularity is limited to a certain economic strata of the society. Go for it after deciding what you are looking for. ■



**POOJA SUKHPAL** has an M.Ed. in Education and research experience with NEEV. She is a content developer and senior associate with iDiscover Education.



# PROMOTING PEACE, ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME

His mission was to open girls' schools in remote parts of conflict-riddled Pakistan and Afghanistan. With big funding agency backing him, his key allies were clerics, warlords, military officers, foreign mountaineers, even former members of the Taliban - one of whom is now a schoolteacher in Kashmir - and an army of ordinary villagers desperate for their children to receive an education. Pakistan recently conferred upon him the 'Sitara-e-Pakistan' - one of the highest civilian awards that the state can give. Mindfields brings you the extraordinary life and work of Greg Mortenson, mountaineer-nurse-educator, and author of the bestselling book, *Three Cups of Tea*.

Text: Mindfields Team | Photos: Greg Mortenson, Central Asia Institute





### A FAILED EXPEDITION, AND THE START OF ANOTHER JOURNEY

K2 or Mount Godwin-Austen, in North Pakistan, is the second highest mountain in the world. In 1993, Greg Mortenson was invited to join a minimal-budget expedition to scale the peak. Mortenson undertook the expedition to honour the memory of his sister Christa, who died at the age of twenty three of a massive epileptic seizure. He carried with him Christa's necklace, which he planned to leave on the top of the mountain. This was not to be.

Two climbers from the team made it to the summit but another developed severe altitude sickness and had to be rescued. Mortenson chose to stay with him, and ended up spending too much time at an ultra-high altitude. On the way down, a disorientated Mortenson became separated from the group. Dehydrated, cold and without enough provisions, he drifted into the tiny Balti village of Korphe, where he was nursed back to health by the villagers. As their friendship blossomed, the village elder Haji Ali taught Mortenson about the Balti tradition of sharing tea - the first cup of tea is shared with a stranger; the second cup, with a friend; the third cup makes you family, and friend for life. It was only as he recovered that he realised how impoverished his rescuers were: how the sugar they put into his tea was precious and expensive; that the smoky hovel he shared was actually the best house in the village. When he was able to walk around, he asked to see the school. There was none.

The children of the village would sit on a little plateau drawing with sticks on the ground, practising whatever a visiting



GREG MORTENSON WITH SOME STUDENTS

### CENTRAL ASIAN INSTITUTE (CAI)

Mortenson's non-profit foundation, the Central Asia Institute ([ikat.org](http://ikat.org)), has built 78 schools serving 28,000 students in remote, politically volatile pockets of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it runs nearly 50 others in regional refugee camps. Nearly all of its \$2.8 million annual budget is funded by modest, individual donations — many of them inspired by Mortenson's story during one of his roughly 150 appearances a year at an eclectic mix of college and high school campuses, churches and civic groups.

teacher may have taught them. Moved by the kindness of Korphe's inhabitants, Mortenson impulsively promised his host, the village elder Haji Ali, that he would return to open a school for Korphe. Little did he know that his words would define the mission of his life.



## MAKING MOUNTAINS MOVE

"It wasn't adults. It was children reaching out to children half-way around the world," he said.

Back in the US, Mortenson devoted himself to finding \$12,000 to finance a 5-room school for Korphe. Then he set about writing letters - to senators, millionaires, and Oprah Winfrey among others - 580 letters in all. He received a single cheque in response - \$100 sent by a student footballer. Then he talked to a class. A fourth-grader in Wisconsin suggested a donation from his piggy bank. Six weeks later those school kids had raised 62,342 pennies. Soon after, he raised enough for the first school - some \$12,000. "What can a penny buy? You can buy a pencil with a penny. And that gives a child hope. If you have hope, you can do anything," remembers Mortenson of the time.

Next, a friend wrote a brief article in the newsletter of the American Himalayan Foundation about the K2 attempt and Mortenson's desire to build a school. Dr. Jean Hoerni, a Seattle microchip pioneer and ardent climber, read it. He sent Mortenson a cheque for \$12,000, along with a note simply saying, "Don't screw up". When Mortenson finally made the long perilous trip back into the Karakorams to Korphe again, the villagers were stunned. Accustomed to trekkers making promises of help they did not keep, no one expected Mortenson to return.

"I was singular in my focus to reach the summit. It was linear and logical, and very Western," remembers Mortenson of his mountaineering days. In building the school for Korphe, Mortenson found a greater way to pay tribute to the memory of his sister. It is a relationship that is going from strength to strength - a relationship between a six foot tall American in salwar kameez, and the mountain people of Central Asia.

## LAYING DOWN A TEMPLATE

In 1996, Mortenson founded the Central Asia Institute (CAI) with Dr Jean Hoerni (see box). The CAI generally sought to go into areas that were under-served because of physical isolation, religious extremism or because they were areas of conflict. The Institute provided villages with skilled labour and materials like stone and steel bars. "The village has to come up



A NEW SCHOOL BUILDING

with the land, with wood, sand and subsidised manual labour.

Each house contributes a certain number of days. We try to get them to match what we're giving. It's not about money," says Mortenson. "It's about getting the village to invest in the school." The CAI's money was, as a principle, handed out in front of the whole village or at an assembly of elders - so that everyone

knew how much had been received. There was complete transparency. That, and intense local involvement made the kind of difference foreign aid efforts had frequently failed to make. Greg Mortenson's project at Korphe went on to establish the template that others followed. At last count, the CAI had set up 55 schools in Pakistan and nine in Afghanistan - with more projects under way!

Over and above everything else, Mortenson admits that it is his ability to bring together the right people that makes him so effective. His core team has gathered serendipitously over the years - most of them consist of people Mortenson interacted with in various capacities over the years, and eventually hired. "I consider my staff to be family," Mortenson says. "They are all family men who have kids and wives. But they are even more willing than me to be gone from their families for months at a time. The CAI's staff is a mix of Sunni, Shia and Ismaili Muslims - a detail that helps drive home the point that the communities can co-exist. "We send Sunni into Shia areas and vice-versa to show we can work together," Mortenson explains.

Setting the curriculum of the CAI schools was a challenge. The CAI use Pakistan's official curriculum for 'Urdu Medium' schools - this includes instruction in Pakistani studies and 'Islamiyat' or Islamic studies. But the CAI adds vital extras such as classes in sanitation, nutrition and hygiene, and also efforts to preserve traditional cultures. In

Baltistan, this means bringing in traditional storytellers, so that the children don't lose their cultural identity as they gain literacy. "Doing work here is so fraught with mistakes and errors that it is worth spending years developing working models rather than saying, 'we'll educate every girl in Pakistan and put computers in every school,'" he says. "A lot depends on complex religious, social and economic relationships, on using their system to come up with

"He is the ultimate social entrepreneur ... a guy with a good idea, prepared to start small and stay with it as long as it takes to have a big impact and commit a lifetime to it. ... he is effective in an area where Americans are not popular, because he relates to people as human beings."

**Bill Clinton on Greg Mortenson**



solutions. It's more important to listen than to talk."

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATING GIRLS

*"If you educate a boy, you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a community."*

*African proverb*

"When a boy goes to school, it's assumed he will leave his village and work. But a girl stays. She grows into a woman, bears healthier children, and encourages them to be educated," points out Mortenson. But female education continues to remain a controversial and dangerous matter in this part of the world. Mortenson repeatedly met serious opposition to the idea of mixed-gender schools. In Afghanistan, Pro-Taliban tribesmen in the North-West Frontier Province threatened to kill girls who went to the local colleges and to execute their teachers. Many girls' schools were bombed and attacked by the Taliban – including one of Mortenson's own schools. Efforts to undo this mindset continued relentlessly with the help of committed and fearless local support. To persuade mullahs and local people that educating girls was a good idea, Mortenson and his staff devised an array of persuasive arguments – an educated girl would bring more bride money; the Prophet's wife herself was an educated woman; an educated mother can help educate her sons.

"Consider the word 'jihad'," says Mortenson, "We know about that word in one context – a violent quest. But the word has other meanings, reflecting other pursuits. But before beginning a jihad, you ask permission from your mother. If she is educated – she's less likely to give approval for a violent mission. Those who dismiss education say that many of the 9/11 hijackers were educated – and that's true," Mortenson says, "But none of their mothers were educated."

Mortenson believes that one reason why the Taliban is so anxious to destroy girls' schools is, that "they are afraid that when these girls grow up they are going to lose control over a large swath of an impoverished, illiterate society. If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. If you educate a girl, you educate a community."

The teachers that the CAI hire are mostly local women, even if they are relatively under-qualified. Bringing in people from outside towns didn't work, Mortenson realised, because of problems with class and caste. In any case, what mattered to him more was sustainability. To help the schools become financially self-sustaining, the CAI funded poplar tree plantations. 'It's important to entrust these communities to



ONE OF THE COMMUNITY GIRLS SCHOOL IN AFGHANISTAN

initiate and manage their own schools. You may not get high results, but you get sustainable results."

TERROR V/S EDUCATION

*"When the Taliban was in power, only 800,000 kids were in school. Today more than 5 million children go to school – and 1.8 million are girls. That's where we should be putting our money."*

Mortenson is clear that he doesn't want to expand the organisation so that it becomes a conventional NGO. "I don't want a big office and a tea-man and a chowkidar," he smiles. Even the office is incidental. During summer, the CAI continues its work out of Room # 6, Indus Motel, Skardu. Otherwise, Greg Mortenson's office is wherever he and his staff are at the time.

Over the years he has developed a nearly encyclopaedic knowledge of the history, culture and religion of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He also has learned the languages spoken in the areas where he works – Balti, Urdu and Farsi. He has come to understand the spiritual aspect of the Muslim faith and its followers and developed a deep sense of respect for the people: a respect that has been lovingly reciprocated by most. His near celebrity-status in the Karakoram mountains has, however, raised the hackles of Islamic extremists, who view him with suspicion. He has been kidnapped for a week by tribesmen in north-west Pakistan, narrowly escaped being shot in a firefight in eastern Afghanistan, and has had two fatwas handed down against him by hostile mullahs. (Local communities in Pakistan fought successfully to have both the fatwas overturned in Sharia courts). But threats have also come Mortenson's way from his own people. Some post-9/11 Americans have been baffled by his attempts to reach out to people of the Islamic faith. "The real enemy," Mortenson emphasises, "is ignorance." He insists that if he dies on the job, it's more likely to be in a car accident on one of the region's treacherous roads, than at the hands of any terrorists. Whatever the future holds, Mortenson's legacy will remain taller than the mountain he failed to climb. ■



**THREE CUPS OF TEA**  
by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin  
PENGUIN, 2006  
(A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER)  
For more information Please visit  
<http://www.gregmortenson.com>





## AND THE CARAVAN MOVES ON

This article is the first in a series based on intimate interviews with men and women who in the late 1940s and 50s were young leaders in India's new civil society. In the first of the series we present Ghulam Naqshband who as a young man in his early twenties founded a socio-cultural organisation called the *Caravan of India*.

Text: Shagufta Bhardwaj | Photos: Studio Umbilical, Mr. Naqshband's personal collection

He was a young man growing up in the 1930s in a small town in what is now Pakistan. From these provincial beginnings, he would go on to discover the vast world beyond his own—and bring the two together. Ghulam Naqshband, popularly known as the 'travel guru of India,' founded the Caravan of India, an influential cultural organisation, in the 1940s and India's first branch of the Alliance Française. He was an employee of the Government of India when Partition came and one of only two Muslim government servants from what is now Pakistan who opted for India. No one else from his family joined him. But he believed in the idea of the new nation of India and played a vital role in the forging of its international identity.



He was always the 'different' son of a Sufi Khalifa in Kasur, a town in the Pakistani Punjab best known for Kasuri Methi (fenugreek). When he was studying in an all-boys school and college, he took an immense interest in becoming pen pals with the 'goras' of other countries. While his brothers were simply being boys, he could often be found writing letters to friends in faraway lands that he had little hope of visiting then.

From these pen friends he came to know of an international socio-cultural movement called the Caravan. The young man was immediately drawn to the core beliefs of the movement. "The Caravan believed that in the World of Tomorrow, the people will salute One Flag, symbolising this great, round, rolling Earth created without frontiers," Mr. Naqshband reminisced.

From that stage he began organising activities that would bring people of diverse backgrounds and cultures together; the kinds of activities he would continue organising for the rest of his life. As a young man he invited the editor of Star Magazine in Lahore, a Hindu who wrote under the pseudonym Qamar Jalalabadi, to visit predominantly Muslim Kasur and speak on Krishna at the Town Hall. The event was organised with help from some of Mr. Naqshband's similarly 'different' friends in Kasur, and the town crier who went about announcing the event. The talk drew over a hundred people, almost all Muslim, coming to listen to the story of Krishna.

Mr. Naqshband founded India's official branch of the Caravan in January 1944. The Statesman in its NEWS IN BRIEF section of January 8, 1944 stated, "A Branch of the 'The Caravan', an American youth movement which aims at inspiring young people of all nations towards a better world order has been formed in Delhi. The Society's next meeting will be held on Sunday at 4, at 7, Rajpur Road, Delhi." This clipping along with several others from popular dailies of the 1940's form the first pages of Mr. Naqshband's meticulously prepared and preserved scrap book.

As I flipped through this thick book full of clippings, complete with photographs and event details of the Caravan of India, the organisation's activities struck me as almost a prototype for the Programmes Desk at the India Habitat Centre: events featuring statesmen, writers, artists, and intellectuals coming together from India and around the world. As I carefully turned more leaves of the scrap book, I discovered that in the 1940s this intercultural youth movement spread like fire. Eminent speakers and patrons from various walks of life and countries addressed the young members. A



Top: (from left) Naqshband, Pandit Nehru, Lady Mountbatten and her daughter Pamela at one of the Caravan's meeting

Bottom: Lady Mountbatten, Pamela Mountbatten, Pandit Nehru

clipping of an article from October 1944 published by the New History Society, New York, of which the Caravan of India was a branch, states that the Caravan under the leadership of G. Naqshband intends to do big things in a big way. "In a country where the population is so gifted and varied, Mr. Naqshband and his branch may strike a unifying note that will electrify the different communities."

Indeed the Caravan organised inter-communal Diwali and Id celebrations, hosted receptions for national and international dignitaries, held fundraising dinners and





Top: Naqshband (3rd from Left) with C. Rajagopalachari (4th from left) in one of the early meetings of the Caravan

Bottom: Naqshband (2nd from Left) with C. Rajagopalachari

balls, and collected funds for famine relief and orphans. In June 1945, the Caravan organised a world-wide contest and announced \$1000 as prize-money for the best essay on 'A United States of the World and a Universal Religion.' The Caravan of India's young members were most active in arranging lectures and art exhibitions on subjects ranging from trends in modern Indian literature to youth movements around the world, to recreation, health, India's economic future, and feminist movements. Some of the Caravan's speakers, who were rather unknown then, are highly respected figures today.

The movement of the Caravan of India took another turn when Lady Mountbatten and her daughter Pamela, the wife and daughter of the British Viceroy, responded to Mr. Naqshband's insistence that they take up an active role. A hesitant Pamela Mountbatten gave her first public speech in May 1947 with the

encouragement of the Caravan's members. With Pamela and her mother as patrons, a new momentum grew behind the already popular Caravan activities. The movement's activities began receiving extensive coverage from national and international newspapers and magazines. This prompted many older people to seek membership in the Caravan. In retrospect, Mr. Naqshband feels that these new members did not join because they believed in the movement's cardinal principles of being a non-political, non-religious, and non-sectarian force for unity. "They thought of it as an elite networking group that would help them with social connections."

The Caravan moved from its first residence at a home in the Civil Lines of Delhi to Room Number 42 of the Y.M.C.A in New Delhi. The move to New Delhi facilitated more guest lectures and activities in the form of a reading room and an auditorium. The space for a reading room was obtained through a clever request to the Commander-in-Chief, Indian Army. Mr. Naqshband wrote to the chief requesting the donation of an Army tent that the Army Commandant used during his travels. The Army donated the tent and encouraged the Caravan's initiative. The tent was duly pitched on the Y.M.C.A. grounds and the Caravan had itself a reading room.

How did he manage to work with so much dedication for the Caravan, though he also had a full time job as a government officer? His answer was as prompt as the man himself is: "Since we all worked after office hours and were committed to our movement, we worked voluntarily without expecting any money. We devoted some part of the day to the Caravan religiously." Even before I could think of the next question, Mr. Naqshband added. "Those days the leaders would come to our social gatherings to speak. They were deeply dedicated to the society that they wished to serve. They appreciated a platform such as the Caravan and happily shared their time and views."

There were times when the response of acceptance to our last minute programmes was sent with equal promptness by the leader." He added that esteemed figures such as Pandit Nehru, Rajagopalachariji, Rajendra Prasad and other leaders were happy participants in the movement. He noted one incident in particular of which I saw many photographs in his scrap book. On the United Nations Charter Day in June 1947 the Caravan organised a last-minute celebration at the Constitution Club. Mr. Naqshband was in such a rush he could not personally hand over the invitation to Pandit Nehru's office, so he was forced to post it. Nehru, to everyone's surprise, arrived right on time for





From left: Gen. Cariappa, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Ghulam Naqshband

the event and spoke extemporaneously at the request of the gathering.

After independence, the Caravan continued to make inroads as a major youth movement. Active branches had already opened in cities such as Lahore and Shimla. The group organised regular health and sanitation workshops in the refugee camps and 'goodwill' concerts in the troubled post-partition times. But with success also came inevitable challenges. The movement became a bitter ground where political rivalries were played out. Older people with vested interests took control of a movement that was meant to be led by the young. Mr. Naqshband left the scene quietly and never looked back.

So what did he do after he left? He continued building institutions to bring peoples and nations together. "I started the Club Française," he told me. The Club was founded in 1952 and he became its secretary. Together with other French-speaking friends in India he held the first French classes and ran a small library out of his own home. "Basically we got hold of any French-speaking people and convinced them to either teach or join our club." The library began with the support of a retired I.C.S officer living in Mussoorie. Mr. Naqshband along with an officer from the French Embassy drove to Mussoorie one weekend and brought back the donation of books in the boot of his car. In 1955, the French government recognised Mr. Naqshband's promotion of Indo-French friendship by inviting him

to visit France. The Club Française would later transform into India's first branch of the Alliance Française.

Mr. Naqshband decided to join the travel business in India when it was still in its infancy. There were very few companies then organising tours for foreign visitors to India, but Mr. Naqshband brought to his new job the organisational and public relations skills that founding the Caravan and the Cercle had given him. He became a pioneer of India's travel industry. Having now travelled all over the world to promote India as a destination, I asked him how he feels now about his life's work. He told me that he still wakes every day up with new ideas and works towards achieving them. Today at 85 years old, he still goes to his office each day at a travel company, where he serves as Chairman Emeritus, with the same enthusiasm he had 60 years ago.

How did Mr. Naqshband ever find the time for all the activities he has undertaken? His advice for young people today comes down to this: time management and discipline are extremely important in the creation of a better society. If you have honesty of purpose, the rewards will come. Today you have the benefit of technology and social networking groups on the web. The youth should prioritise their lives and give some time back to their society and country. There is endless potential and one needs to keep looking for ways to make a contribution. Do not wait for people to make a contribution. Start making your own efforts from today.

Mr. Naqshband has now outlived many of his colleagues and fellow Caravan members. But he's not giving up on working for his vision of the world anytime soon. "I believe in God—after all he saved me when I religiously cycled up and down from Old to New Delhi during the intense post-partition days, for work. I also believe in unity of the world and I think God wishes that." During those troubled times at India's birth, Mr. Naqshband and other young people stood against the division and mistrust to build a more united nation. They remind us how powerful youth with dedication and vision can be in shaping our country's future. ■



**SHAGUFIA BHARDWAJ**

is a cultural historian, advisor and educator. Leads Sunday walks to heritage sites for the India Habitat Centre. Can generally be found in the narrowest lanes leading to the oldest havelis in Delhi.



# MY FIRST TEACHER

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy's first teacher was like no other. There were always two or three children following her around like kittens following their mama cat - she had that kind of effect on children. Let people be true to themselves, she believed, and the rest will follow.

Text: Jayaprakash Satyamurthy | Illustrations: Amruta Patil

**M**y first teacher, Mrs. Vanitha Bhushan, wasn't like any of the other teachers I've had since, in school and college. She didn't want you to be anything but yourself - but she did have certain standards she expected you to hold yourself to. This attitude was so at odds with all the other educationists whose hands I passed through after that. Teachers who informed me that I had to think about how I could fit into society. Teachers who smugly informed me that they were going to mould me. Who told me that my parents would be ashamed of me if I didn't do exactly as I was told. Who told me that I would never get anywhere in life unless I followed their endless rules and regulations.

None of them ever seemed to have heard of the very simple idea Mrs. Bhushan lived by. Let people be true to themselves, and the rest will follow. This is an especially excellent concept to introduce to a child, who is only beginning to realize he or she is a person.

It might seem that Mrs. Bhushan was lenient. She could certainly be very understanding. Once, she showed me a new cuckoo clock that her son-in-law had sent her. A while later, I went back with an accomplice or two recruited from among my classmates and took the clock apart, trying to figure out





where the cuckoo went when it wasn't singing out the hour. The clock was a write-off. Anyone else would have unleashed the furies at that point, but Mrs. Bhushan was merely amused. She knew it was curiosity, not destructiveness that had moved us.

Another time, there was a set of new wooden ducks in school that I was very taken with. I especially liked the smallest one, which I painted red. One day, I took it home with me, and then realizing what I'd done,

lived in fear of the scoldings that might ensue. I needn't have worried. A couple of days later, when my mother came to pick me up from school, Mrs. Bhushan said, 'JP's taken one of our new ducks home to play with. He must have been scared to ask if he could borrow it.' Of course my mother made me return the duck the next day, and I did, but it was with a sense of relief. Yes, I'd wanted to play with the duck, but no, I didn't really want to steal something from school. Mrs. Bhushan had made it easy for me to come clean



without being labelled a thief. It's a terrible thing to label children too soon. But it happens all too often. 'Dullard,' 'Idiot,' 'Rascal.' And so on. How can you hang such a huge label on a tiny human being who's just started being human? No wonder so many people grow up morally and mentally stunted.

When I was out of line, Mrs. Bhushan could be firm. I was a restless child, easily bored and constantly talking. When I started distracting my classmates too much, Mrs. Bhushan would make me leave the learning environment and sit by myself in a quiet room until I was ready to go and take part in the learning activities again. I think the sheer boredom of this punishment inspired me to behave more than anything else. To be honest, it was always short-lived, but people who don't expect children to be full of excess energy probably also think the sky is hollow and the world is flat.

My family stayed in touch with Mrs. Bhushan over the years, and I have many more memories of her. Everytime I visited Lumbini again, I would see a group of 2 or 3 new children following her around like kittens following their mama cat. She had that effect on children.

Once, she had shaved her head on a pilgrimage. When we went to meet her, she didn't wear a scarf or a cap



to cover her bald head. She held herself with the same clam grace she always possessed. A small thing, but one that showed me how much she lived by the values that she passed on to us. In fact, she probably passed them on so well because she lived by them, rather than preached them.

While she was teaching her paid students, she would also take on the children of her servants and educate them alongside us. The school Ayah's son, Ramesh, was my classmate and best friend through most of my years in Lumbini. Ramesh's nephews and nieces are now educated young people with careers that their parents and grandparents could only dream of. I know that some schools today partner with schools that educate what they call underprivileged children. But I don't think many of them have realized that the best way to combat a lack of privilege is to give those children the same privileges their own students have. It makes a world of difference.

Everyone Mrs. Bhushan came into contact with learned from her. My mother says that she learned about hospitality and empathy from Mrs. Bhushan. Today, my mother teaches children in a small town in rural Karnataka how to speak, read and write English. There's a whole batch of youngsters there growing up with English language skills far in advance of what their official syllabus affords them. I think she definitely learned a thing or two from Mrs. Bhushan. I hope I can say the same of myself some day. ■



JAYAPRAKASH SATYAMURTHY J lives in Bangalore with his wife, two dogs, several cats and a ridiculous number of comics. He is a writer His blog is <http://aaahfoeey.blogspot.com>



# MUSTWATCH

Iggy Ahluwalia, film professional and avid film buff recommends her Top 3 World Cinema picks – all three stories revolve around the lives and concerns of young people, but come from diverse geographical and cultural contexts.

## CHILDREN OF HEAVEN

Year of Release: 1997

Director: Majid Majidi

Cast: Mir Farukh Hashemian, Bahareh Seddiqi, Amir Naji

Language: Persian (English subtitles)

Run time: 89 mins



### Synopsis:

Ali takes his little sister Zahra's shoes to the shoemaker to be repaired, but loses them on the way home. The siblings decide to keep the predicament a secret from their parents, knowing that there is no money to buy a replacement pair and fearing that they will be punished. They devise a scheme to share Ali's sneakers: Zahra will wear them to school in the morning and hand them off to Ali at midday so he can attend afternoon classes. This uncomfortable arrangement leads to one adventure after another as they attempt to hide the plan from their parents and teachers, attend to their schoolwork and errands, and acquire a new pair of shoes for Zahra. Zahra sees the shoes on a schoolmate's feet, and follows her home, but the two soon become friends.

Ali enters a high-profile children's footrace in the hope of receiving the third prize of a new pair of sneakers. He accidentally places first and wins another prize instead. The film ends with Zahra finding out that she will not get a new pair of shoes, but there is a quick shot of their father's bicycle at the end of the movie that shows

what appears to be the red shoes Zahra had been focusing on earlier and another pair of white sneakers, presumably for Ali, whose old sneakers were torn from so much use. The film ends with the final shot showing blisters on Ali's feet. Some versions include an epilogue revealing that Ali eventually achieves the larger-scale success of having a racing career.

## MISHEHU LARUTZ ITO (SOMEONE TO RUN WITH)

Year of Release: 2006

Director: Oded Davidoff

Cast: Bar Belfer, Yonatan Bar-Or, Yuval Mendelson

Language: Hebrew (English subtitles)

Run time: 118 mins



### Synopsis:

The film is about the lives of two teenagers in the streets of Jerusalem. Tamar, a talented introvert, leaves behind home and identity undertake a dangerous mission to help a loved one. Asaf, a painfully shy boy gives himself the task of taking an uncontrollable lost stray dog back to its owners. The dog – Dinka – leads Asaf through the city to the people and places that will tell him about Tamar, and her sudden disappearance. The more Asaf hears about Tamar, the more he falls in love with her. He and Dinka set out to rescue her from her own rescue mission. The film is based on a story by David Grossman – and is a poetic ode to growing up, finding the strength to overcome your fears, understanding true friendship and

love, and best of all, finding someone to run with.

## VIDA Y COLOR (LIFE IN COLOR)

Year of Release: 2005

Director: Santiago Tabernero

Cast: Junio Valverde, Silvia Abascal, Joan Dalmau

Language: Spanish (English subtitles)

Run time: 90 minutes



### Synopsis:

Santiago Tabernero's coming-of-age tale is set in a Spanish village in the summer of 1975 – when color TVs were on the verge of entering middle-class homes, and the lives of common people were about to change with the impending death of fascist Francisco Franco. Tabernero filters his story through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old boy, Fede who lives in the hamlet of Las Islas with his sister Bego, parents and grandfather – a man who saves a bottle of champagne to gear up for the ensuing celebration of Franco's death. The sweet-natured Fede must contend with constant bullying by the punk Benito, and spends most of his time with two friends: the quiet, introverted Sara and her Down's Syndrome-afflicted sister – both victims of emotional abuse at the hands of a mentally unstable father. Several parallel stories are interwoven to create a tender, vivid portrait of life in the village. ■



# RECOMMENDED READING

Text: Aravinda A



## THE LION AND THE LAMB

by Jonathan Harlen

Hodder Books

One comes across so many books by American and British authors that I picked this one because it's by an Australian writer and I was curious to see the things they write about. It turned out to be a fantastic choice for Harlen is first and foremost a skilled and sensitive writer, and *The Lion and the Lamb* is a very well written story.

Set in an urban Australian locale, *The Lion and the Lamb* is the story of neighbours, migrants, four children and their fathers, life in the city, political differences, racism – all of these and more. First, a brief on the novel: When Hector Castillo (who's Nicaraguan) is bullied by the Russian twins Evgeny and Dimitri Stolkov who live upstairs, his father Juan is furious. He stomps up to their flat and threatens the Stolkovs with his gun much to everyone's horror. And as if to drive home the fact that he's serious, he shoots the goldfish that belongs to one of the boys. Hector makes it up to him by buying him two goldfish as a present and there's truce between the three boys that soon leads to easy camaraderie, their cultural differences notwithstanding.

Hector finds it far more difficult to bridge the differences with his father. Their relationship is strained but as relationships with family members go, it's also undeniably close. Juan wants his son to be a fighter and tells him, 'It's a shame you are a man.'

And Hector retorts – 'It's a shame I have a man like you for a father.'

Yet, all Hector wants to be is a fisherman, just like his father had been in the old country. Touching without being sentimental.

There are a lot of things that I liked about the book, most of all that it's not preachy and that it doesn't explore the racism or cultural angle very explicitly. Harlen's characters are people first and all other things that define them, later. In an early interview that I found online, Harlen has said, 'The restrained nature of the narrative voice also has to do I think with my reluctance to impose judgements, I don't mean to portray what happens as shocking or unconscionable, that's simply what happens...I don't believe there will ever be an end to the conflicts of race,

class and gender. I think people's attitudes toward these things are forged somewhere very deep in the mind, far beyond the public realm in which a writer has any influence.'

I don't know about that but what I do believe is that words carry a great deal of power and perhaps books like this will drive us all towards thinking about creating a better world.



## TURNING THE POT, TILLING THE LAND

Kancha Ilaiah

Navayana

I picked up this book because I'd heard Navayana's publisher, Anand talk about it a year ago. This indie publishing house focuses on the issue of caste, 'from an anti-caste perspective' and I wanted to see how they would communicate that in a children's book. *Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land* is written by Kancha Ilaiah, Professor of Political Science from Osmania University and has been designed as a classroom text with 11 chapters.

*Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land* is a remarkable attempt at espousing the case of dignity of labour, something woefully lacking in our society. It begins with an introduction to the Adivasis and goes on to introduce those whose labours have been relegated to the bottom rungs in the caste system – leather workers, potters, dhobis, weavers, barbers, farmers and cattle-rearers.

I recommend this book strongly but let me warn you that Kancha Ilaiah sounds like an angry man. His writing is well grounded and the book is informative but one senses his anger in trying to explain why the caste system is unacceptable and how the Adivasis have contributed much to the world and society. It must be frustrating, one can imagine, and I do hope educators and students will read this book through to the end even if it makes for a little heavy reading.

Ilaiah also explores labour in relation to religion and gender and sort of places it within a larger context, which certainly helps one understand how things have been shaped over the years. The exercises at the end of the chapter keep the mood going for more introspection on

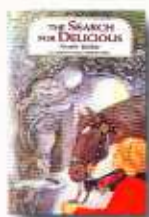


this issue. And offer a very valid case against a caste-based social structure.

There is easy access to information with interesting facts breaking the text, although it still remains a serious book for study. But illustrations by Durgabai Vyam (Ghond artist par excellence and more famously known for her illustrations in One, Two, Three!) are beautiful and add great value to the book.

Read this book because there's nothing else really that will tell it like it is. It's hard hitting, well researched, and more importantly, an honest book.

P.S. Tulika has just brought out a Tamil translation of the same book.



### THE SEARCH FOR DELICIOUS

Natalie Babbitt

Holtzbrinck Publishers

Was browsing at the library here and this book called out to me, not because Babbitt is an award winning author, or because everyone's read or watched Tuck Everlasting. I think the title did it, reminding me of a slower age (and why not, since it was written in 1969!)

When the Prime Minister of this strange mythical kingdom begins compiling a dictionary, he's headed for trouble of an unexpected kind when he reaches the word Delicious. The Prime Minister's choice for Delicious - fried fish - angers the king (which is Calamitous as defined in the very same dictionary) who thinks apples are delicious only to be contradicted by his queen who counters it with Christmas pudding.

As hell threatens to break loose the king orders for a poll and the Prime Minister's ward, 12-year old Gaylen is selected for the task. Now Gaylen sets off on this journey only to find that the King's brother-in-law, Hemlock (love that name, don't you?) has gone ahead before him and is poisoning the citizens' ears against the king.

Gaylen has his work cut out for him for he's gone only a few days when already the kingdom is on the brink of a Civil War. Adding to the excitement is an ancient fable, a

woldweller in the exact center of the forest who Gaylen meets, a minstrel with a mysterious key and the dwarves who sing of Ardis the mermaid. He now has to finish his poll and save the king and the Prime Minister from Hemlock's evil but very good plan, and somehow make sense of this old tale he finds himself in.

What a delicious mix of fantasy and adventure! Babbitt began as an illustrator but soon turned writer, and thank goodness, for what a wealth of stories she has produced! The Search for Delicious is a rare story. I think it's a great book especially if you are trying to interest a reluctant reader - it's written in a language that holds great appeal. Try it and let us know if it works.

### THE GOOD READING GUIDE

1. Little Monster's Big Book of Fears by Emily Gravett 5 to 7
2. Mercy Watson to the Rescue by Kate DiCamillo 5 to 7
3. The Stray Dog by Marc Simont 5 to 7
4. Peppe the Lamplighter by Elisa Bartone 5 to 7
5. Gooney Bird Greene by Lois Lowry 7 to 9
6. Miss Daisy is Crazy (My Weird School) by Dan Gutman 7 to 9
7. How to Be a Detective (Damien Drooth Supersleuth) by Barbara Mitchell Hill 7 to 9
8. The Fivetongued Firefanged Folkadotted Dragon Snake by Anushka Ravishankar 7 to 9
9. Contrary Bear by Phyllis Root 7 to 9
10. The Lion and the Lamb by Jonathan Harlem 9+
11. Coping with Teachers by Peter Corey 9-12
12. I, Coriander by Sally Gardner 9+
13. In Search of Delicious by Natalie Babbitt 9-12
14. Dial a Ghost by Eva Ibbotson 9-12
15. Expedition to Blue Cave (The Outriders) by Ed Decter 12+
16. Ghond the Hunter by Dhan Gopal Mukherji 12+
17. The Broken Bridge by Philip Pullman 12+
18. Odin's Voice by Susan Price 12+
19. Writers and their Tall Tales by Tracy Turner 12+
20. Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land by Kancha Iliah 12+



#### ARAVINDA A.

Joined Hippocampus to be around books. Likes writing and tries to earn a living from it. Loves the company of dogs. Agrees completely with the anon Zen master who said, "I never got lost because I don't know where I'm going."



## RETRAINING SENIOR TEACHERS

Tamil Nadu

About 2000 teachers who were appointed as middle school teachers on the basis of their seniority will be trained by the Elementary Education Department (EED) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to refresh themselves academically. "Most of the inducted teachers are in the age group of 40-50 and have lost touch with the syllabus. This training will help refresh their knowledge," said a SSA official. The training session (dealing with methodology and syllabus of Grades 6-8) will last for 6 days.

## COMPETITION - NOT FOR US

Goa

The number of people able to crack national competitive exams from Goa remains small, despite having one of the highest literacy rates and among the best school level infrastructures in the country among other advantages. Experts claim that this is due to lack of awareness of the exams, the near absence of coaching classes for competitive exams in the state and the missing competitive edge among students.

Goa's literacy rate stands at 82.11% and surveys of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) have ranked Goa as one of the best

in school education since 2005. Yet, until the academic year 2005-06, for over a decade, only two Goans were able to crack entrance exams for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). The numbers began picking up only after coaching classes appeared on the scene from 2005 onwards and it is not only with the IITs, but the state has seen very few being able to compete at an all India level.

G P Bhat, principal of the District Institute for Educational Training (DIET) and former director of the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) believes that Goa not following the NCERT syllabus on par with the national level up to 2006 was one of main reasons. Project director for Goa, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, P R Nadkarni, on the other hand, thinks that the state's small population of students, as compared to other states, means there's not sufficient competition.

## NEW APPROACH TO PRIMARY EDUCATION FACES MANY TESTS

New Delhi

Sanjana Bhambhani, 9, has a vague idea of what a test is. She thinks hard before answering. "You get a sheet of paper," she says, and pauses, "they ask you to finish it off in one hour or something". The reason why this student of Shri Ram School, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi, doesn't know about tests



is because she has never been tested. Instead of test scores, her school sends home reports that contain a personal profile, remarks from subject teachers, and an excel-sheet type record of her performance in yoga, physical education, art and craft, music and dance.

It is this type of assessment of primary school children (age group 5-11) that the National Council of Educational Research and Training, or NCERT, is trying to popularize among teachers of both private and government-run schools. The organization's director, Krishna Kumar, who revamped school curriculum in 2006, even taking on Parliament in the process, wants teachers to move away from examinations to continuous, daily assessment. To guide teachers on how to switch over from the old test score-based system, NCERT has released source books or guidelines on assessment which ask teachers to prepare a child's profile, maintain a portfolio of his work, and write qualitative or descriptive statement's of a child's work. The source books will be publicized and supplied to schools in the next two years.

## STUDENTS GET DETAILS OF EXAM MARKS

Maharashtra

For millions of students, the battle to know details of their performance in board exams or competitive entrance tests has ended. In a landmark judgment that will change how

examinations are conducted in the country, the Central Information Commission has ruled that exam-conducting authorities must usher in transparency and provide question-wise marks awarded to candidates under the Right To Information Act. The ruling will bring cheer to India's large student population, which has been fighting for access to copies of answer sheets ever since the Right To Information Act was passed.

## INDIA'S MOST INNOVATIVE SCHOOL TEACHERS 2008

Uttar Pradesh

178 teachers from 53 schools in the city convened for a 'Learning by Discovery' workshop and the Tata Consultancy Services-EducationWorld Teachers Awards 2008, on November 18. Eight primary and secondary school teachers from across the country were felicitated for being India's most innovative primary and secondary teachers for the year 2008:

- Nomita Roy, Vasant Valley School (Delhi)
- Indrani Singh, ADLS Sunshine School (Jamshedpur)
- Sangita Gupta, Study Hall College (Lucknow)
- Malvika Vohra, Vasant Valley School (Delhi)
- Mysore Sri Durga, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Public School (Hyderabad)
- Shamim Siddiq Lakhani, Children's Academy (Malad)
- Preetha Balakrishnan, St. Anthony Higher Secondary School (Cochin)
- V. Lakshmi Gandhi, Abhinav Vidyalaya English Medium High School (Pune)

## HATE SCAN ON SCHOOL TEXTS

New Delhi

Human resource development minister Arjun Singh has asked officials to speed up plans to introduce a central panel armed with legal powers to question publishers and schools on textbooks alleged to be spreading communal hatred. The National Textbook Council will specifically target books used at schools run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates, top government officials said.

However, while it can call publishers and schools to question contents of a textbook, the council cannot order any action against them if it finds the textbooks are indeed spreading disharmony. "The council can only counsel, not act against the publisher or school," a source said. Arjun's prod follows a letter to him and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from chemicals and fertilisers minister Ram Vilas Paswan last week, urgently seeking their intervention in preventing textbooks used in RSS schools from "fabricating history".

[http://203.200.40.161:81/infoedu/activeNews\\_categories.asp?catID=1&page=20](http://203.200.40.161:81/infoedu/activeNews_categories.asp?catID=1&page=20)





I'M NOT SURE HOW THIS CONVERSATION BEGAN, BUT IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE RAMAYANA, AND WITH THE WICKED MANTHARA OF THE HUNCHED BACK. WE WERE IN THE GARDEN WHEN MY SON ANNOUNCED -







THE BENCH WAS EMANATING ALL THE ACCUMULATED HEAT OF THE DAY, AND I FOUND MYSELF TELLING HIM A HIGHLY POTTED VERSION OF DORIAN GRAY. AT THE END OF IT, MY SON LOOKED RATHER PUZZLED. FINALLY, HE SAID -



I CAN ONLY SIGH IN RESPONSE.

\*A HORCRUX IS A FICTIONAL MAGIC OBJECT IN JK ROWLING'S 'HARRY POTTER' SERIES. IT IS A DARK MAGIC DEVICE CREATED TO HELP ATTAIN IMMORTALITY. (WIKIPEDIA)



SRIMALA SWAMI was a film editor from the FTII, Pune. Now she writes poetry and fiction and brings up her son. Her first collection of poetry, *A Reluctant Survivor*, was published by The Sahitya Akademi in 2007. Three books for very young children are due to be published by Pratham later this year.





## ONE KIND OF HERO

*We do not need to proselytize either by our speech or by our writing. We can only do so really with our lives. Let our lives be open books for all to study. - M.K. GANDHI*

I recently met a US-returned friend at the airport, and while we waited for our baggage, we got talking about Barack Obama's inauguration. My friend was sharing how everyone there, himself included, just couldn't get enough of him. The minutest Obama detail was 'information'. "Don't you think this is blown out of proportion?" I asked with some exasperation. "Oh, it certainly is," said he, "But Obama has given the world hope. And that's a big thing."

At a time when we have witnessed mind-numbing terrorist attacks on live TV, and the world is experiencing the worst economic recession in two generations - the need for hope is unarguable. Where do we find hope? Who do we turn to? What do you tell your children about what is happening, and what it may mean for their future? It's been on my mind. I'm sure it's been on the minds of others.

Some years ago, I did a piece of research to explore why young people of similar talent and privilege differ in their appetite for "good work". Good work, in this case, being defined as work that apart from being of good quality was also socially relevant and impacted society more than the regular, more fancied professions. I also decided to check if these 'good workers' had any role models from whom they drew inspiration.

In the findings, two things struck me most. First, the role of early experiences in the choices people make. Almost all 'good workers' narrate early experiences with adults

they looked up to that left a mark on them. One spoke of his father encouraging him to do away with flashy birthday parties and visit an orphanage each year to donate money. Another spoke of regular community meetings she attended with her parents. Even without reading too much into these testimonies, I had a distinct sense that an early sensitization to a world beyond their own had an important role to play in their worldview and ultimately their work choices.

Second, it was remarkable to me that most young people were unable to decisively name a role model for themselves. Apart from the regard for their own parents, and the odd mention of Narayan Murthy, for the most part young Indians did not have a hero or ideal they could turn to for inspiration. I specifically probed for Gandhi, and found that most respondents were unable to see the relevance of his life and work in the modern day. There was really no one. I couldn't help be reminded of the Simon & Garfunkel's unforgettable lines: "Where have you gone Joe DiMaggio? Our nation turns its lonely eyes to you."

Societies need heroes. A society that's being tested cannot do without heroes. It is often said that people get the leaders they deserve. But a closer look suggests that there is only really one kind of leader. In his classic *The Hero with Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell traces the archetypal hero across cultures, across history. A hero, says Campbell, is known not by who he is, but by his journey. A journey marked by three clearly identifiable characteristics: forsaking

the easy present to embrace a new world (like Gautam Buddha did); engaging and persisting in the battle for right, no matter what the cost (like Arjun eventually did); and returning to the people with a message of hope (like Rama did, perhaps). And then the cycle repeats. This journey is true not only for our own mythical heroes - but for Moses, King Arthur, or even Simba for that matter.

Little surprise that in cultures around the world there is value attached to telling these stories to the young. One sometimes wonders why so many of these tales are not always pleasant or innocent. This is the way the adult world prepares its young - with messages of engagement, persistence, conquest, hope - survival essentials in the world they will grow in to.

Much before I became a father, an older person dealing with teenage children told me, "Till they are ten, they listen to everything you say. Then onwards they do the exact opposite." Cynical as it might sound, there is a useful message there. What we share with our young children could make all the difference. I would go a step beyond and say doing-with-them, is as important as sharing-with them. That time won't come back.

And yes Mr. Obama, the message of hope is just one of the three tests of hero. Let's see you forsake, engage, and conquer. Then you will enter the grandmothers' tales. ■

Ashish Rajpal is the CEO of iDiscover Education









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